HOMI BHABHA

AN INTRODUCTION AND CRITIQUE

VOLUME 3: POLITICAL THEORY AND PRACTICE

Andrew McLaverty-Robinson

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Some of the materials contained in these volumes will be adapted for use in the author's column, https://ceasefiremagazine.co.uk/category/columns/in-theory/ where related materials on poststructuralism and critical theory can already be found.

About the Author

Andrew McLaverty-Robinson, who has previously published under the name Andrew Robinson or Andy Robinson, is a recovering former academic, freelance scholar and political commentator based in the UK. He has previously co-authored *Power, Conflict and Resistance in the Contemporary World* with Athina Karatzogianni, and co-edited *Riots and Militant Occupations* with Alissa Starodub. He has published over 20 peer-reviewed articles and chapters on a wide range of topics including critical theory, discourse, and radical politics.

Note on Readability

One of the purposes of this book is to provide an accurate, not "dumbed down", but accessible introduction to a theorist whose works are notoriously difficult. The author has run the text through a document readability tool prior to publication. The

book registers at 14.43 on the Gunning Fog Index, 13.47 on the Coleman Liau Index, 12.29 on Flesch Kincaid Grade Level, 11.67 on Automated Readability Index (ARI), 13.69 on SMOG, and 36.32 on Flesch Reading Ease. This indicates that an A-level student in the UK or an American in the top school grade or first year at university will be able to understand the text easily on a first reading. A representative sample from Homi Bhabha's *Location of Culture* scores 21.57 on the Gunning Fog Index and 18.50 on the Grade Level. This should be taken as indicative only, as these tools do not capture qualitative aspects of reading ease or difficulty.

CHAPTER 10

Interlude on Neoliberalism and Postmodernity

This chapter takes a break from analysing Bhabha to situate the following discussion of the political implications of his work. Bhabha wrote mainly in the 1980s-90s, when neoliberalism was first emerging as a system. He focused on the critique of modern reason and representational language (see above, Chapter 2). He celebrated changes in the world which broke down secure identities and increased a sense of disjuncture and anxiety (see above, 331-46). In discussing why this might be politically problematic, it's important to place it in the context of the transition from Fordism to neoliberalism. Bhabha's theory in many ways focuses on a critique of Fordism. Fordism involved fixed meanings and supposedly secure social arrangements. Disruption of fixed meanings was a central aspect of the critique of Fordism in the 1960s-70s. But the nature of Bhabha's critique is sometimes similar to the neoliberal alternative to Fordism which was being created while he was writing. And it often overlaps with the impersonal, cybernetic forms of control which are becoming common today. This puts a contemporary reader in a different relationship to Bhabha's work than his original readers would have been. This chapter discusses the ideas of Fordism, neoliberalism, and cybernetics which the later chapters use to situate Bhabha.

Fordism

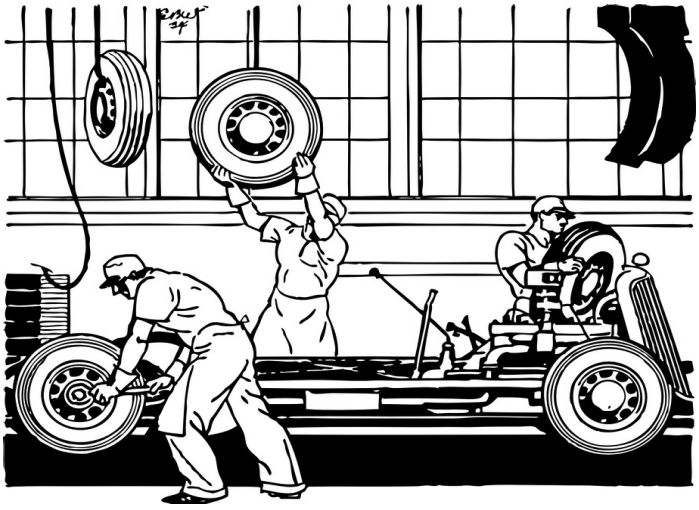
Fordism is a name for the type of industrial society which existed in most of the world from about the 1930s to the 1970s. It is named after the American car company, Ford, which pioneered many of the methods referred to as Fordist. The term was first used by Gramsci in the 1930s. One key feature of Fordism is the mass-production of standardised products. These products are usually produced on factory production lines. The workers making the products don't require much skill. The process of mass production is very different from earlier kinds of artisan production. Factories have existed since the industrial revolution, but Fordism makes them more large-scale and efficient.

Fordism was accompanied by "Taylorism". This was a method of supposedly scientific management. In Taylorism, the work process is broken up into small, repeatable units which can be performed by unskilled workers. Managers have a lot of overall control of the work process. Labour can thus be controlled, intensified, and made more routine. Fordism and Taylorism reduced the number of workers needed to produce products. And they "deskilled" the work process. Skilled workers were no longer needed to make complex goods. This meant that far more products could be made than before. For example, Ford was able to mass-produce cars on a scale which made it viable for lots of people to own cars. Other products which became common during Fordism include radios, televisions, fridges, machine guns, plastic toys, vacuum cleaners, washing machines, pills, and flush toilets.

Consumerism was another important element of Fordism. To reduce absenteeism and worker turnover, workers in Fordist factories were paid more than other workers. This had the side-effect that more people could afford to buy the products which were being mass-produced. This "mass market" is another important aspect of Fordism. Workers in Fordist economies are paid higher wages than in other forms of capitalism. These wages are supplemented by a so-called "social wage". For example, poorer people receive free

services from the state, and welfare benefits.

Western governments often used Keynesian economic politics (based on the theories of John Maynard Keynes) in the later years of Fordism. These policies sought to increase market demand for products so as to strengthen economies. In particular, governments using Keynesian policies intervene during recessions and depressions to increase or stabilise demand. Crises are thought to happen because companies are producing more products than consumers can buy. The government can solve this problem by giving consumers more money or buying products itself. Keynesian economics went out of fashion because it couldn't explain the 1970s economic crisis. But it has reappeared since the 2008 financial crash. The main alternative to Keynesianism was the Soviet model, in which the state controlled almost the entire economy. The government decided what would be produced and how labour and resources would be assigned. This is known as a "command economy" model. Somewhere between a third and a half of the world's population lived in Soviet-style "communist" countries at the peak of orthodox communism. Like Keynesian social-democracies, communist countries also had strong welfare states and relatively high wages.



The Fordist model was implemented most comprehensively in the richer countries of Europe, North America and Japan, and in the orthodox communist countries of Eastern Europe. By the 1960s, most workers in these countries were being paid "living" wages from which they could afford to purchase mass-produced goods as well as meeting their basic needs. Sometimes these wages were high enough that one man's wage covered the expenses of an entire family. Women might then "stay at home" and not get jobs. There was also (near-)full employment in the richer countries. Nearly everyone had a job. This strengthened workers' bargaining power. Workers also tended to have "jobs for life". It was difficult for bosses to fire workers. By the 1950s, trade unions were generally recognised and were relatively strong in the workplace. In some countries, they became part of the management and welfare provision systems. Governments, union leaders, and business leaders worked together as partners to run the economy. Some Marxists, such as the Regulation School, view Fordism as a "regime of accumulation". They see it as a particular way of arranging the whole of society so as to produce profits and economic growth for capitalists. Its key features were mass production and mass consumption. In Europe, states played a central role in creating the conditions for Fordism. In particular, states sought to stabilise economies and increase the level of demand for products through Keynesian economics.

Fordism was first elaborated in America. In Europe, it was imported and copied. Part of its appeal to European bosses was its swingeing modernism. Fordist and Taylorist methods seemed to be scientific and efficient. They seemed able to sweep away pre-capitalist social structures by arranging everything in terms of technological rationality. These modernist hopes were partly undermined by the 1930s depression and the Second World War. During the war, mass-production and regimentation were widely used not only to produce weapons, but to kill people on an industrial scale. The Holocaust in particular was an almost industrial undertaking. However, after World War 2, modernist fantasies and especially consumerism regained some of their attractiveness. The US sought to undermine Soviet influence in Europe through trade fairs showing off consumer goods.

The west was always better than the Soviet bloc at providing consumer goods, and this was an important factor in the outcome of the Cold War.

Fordism wasn't fully implemented in the "Third World". Poorer countries usually sought to develop along Fordist lines. But this proved difficult to do. Often, "Third World" countries were consigned to a role as suppliers of low-value agricultural and extracted goods to fuel other countries' Fordist economies. Fordism started to emerge in the 1920s-30s. At this point, a lot of Southern countries were colonies. Many anti-colonial movements sought to win the full benefits of Fordism for "Third World" peoples. Hence, Fordism coincided with the period of decolonisation struggles and the rise of dependency theory. The idea was to build post-independence nation-states which would either have command economies or social-democratic Fordist/Keynesian economies. However, a few anti-colonial movements, such as Gandhi's self-determination movement in India, were opposed to the Fordist industrial model. Gandhi wanted a return to local handicrafts production and a focus on personal ethical virtue. Nearly all countries implemented Fordism to some degree after independence. However, the core sector of well-paid workers was sometimes very small. Core industries might be built up by exploiting poorer peasants or informal-sector workers.

In Fordism, workers in primary economic sectors such as industry were paid wages high enough to cover living costs and afford consumer goods. But Fordist economies often involved "secondary labour markets". Workers in these secondary markets were paid much lower wages than core Fordist workers. Often, oppressed racial minorities, colonised peoples, and working women were confined to secondary labour markets. There were either formal discriminatory policies or informal structures which let bosses pay these groups less, and which reduced access to the "social wage". Sometimes, low wages in secondary labour markets were underpinned by the continuing existence of peasant or subsistence economies. Workers could work for very low wages because they didn't depend on their wage to meet most of their living costs (see Wolpe, 1972). It's often

argued today that Fordism only benefited white male workers in the global North. It's suggested that the desires of formerly included workers to restore Fordism are reactionary, racist and sexist.

However, this argument is overplayed. It's true that white male workers were better-off in the Fordist period than women, racial minorities, or people in the global South. But it's also true that women, racial minorities, and people in the global South were sometimes better-off in Fordism than they are in neoliberalism. For example, a lot of "Third World" countries had much bigger, more inclusive welfare states in the 1960s than they have today. Egypt employed about half its population in state-owned enterprises. This meant that they had jobs for life with good pay. Maoist China provided basic welfare and full employment. Housing was provided free. Except for periods of famine, everyone was guaranteed food. India also started to build a universal welfare state. Black Americans were discriminated against, but they had access to jobs and benefits. They mostly lived in stable, all-black communities with a sense of social solidarity. Later trends towards military-style police occupation of black communities had not yet developed. In the 1950s-60s progressive ideologies were influential. Many countries started to implement gender equality laws, because they needed more women in the workforce. Also, the aspirations of women, black Americans, and colonised peoples were defined by the things Fordist workers already had. The relatively good treatment of included workers under Fordism provided a goal for social movements of marginalised groups to aspire to.

But there were regions where things were very bad. For example, in rural Latin America, many peasants still lived in serf-like conditions on massive plantations. Their survival depended on patronage from the plantation owner. African state development policies often focused on cities rather than the rural majority. It was a long time before peasants started to get access to healthcare, sewage, water and so on. South Africa and the US South were racially segregated throughout most of the Fordist period. South Africa kept

black workers in the cities in a state of precarity. They were officially foreigners and could be deported at any time. By the 1960s, these situations were fuelling unrest and rebellion. These rebellions overlapped a lot with the wider revolts against Fordism which began in this period.

The last decades of Fordism were periods of decolonisation and revolt. There is a recurring pattern that rich, former imperial countries import cheap primary goods (mostly agricultural or extractive, e.g. mined, goods) from poor, formerly colonised countries. In return, they export more expensive, manufactured goods and high-value services. This pattern was established during the colonial period. It continued into the Fordist period. Dependency theory highlights the ways in which primary goods are undervalued, their value tends to go down over time, and their prices are less stable than those of Northern-produced goods. They argue that the pattern of trading primary for high-value-added goods leads to increasing "underdevelopment" or relative impoverishment of poor countries. But countries began to break out of it in the late Fordist period, after decolonisation. They tried to develop more balanced economies by building up industries and services. One common way to do this was "import substitution industrialisation". States put restrictions such as high taxes on high-value industrial imports, and also put money into producing the same products locally. Restricting imports to protect local producers is known as "protectionism". It can be pursued either across the board, or just in a few targeted sectors. Protectionism is compatible with mercantilism, or the organised promotion of trade or exports in particular sectors. Under Fordism, most countries used some degree of protectionism.

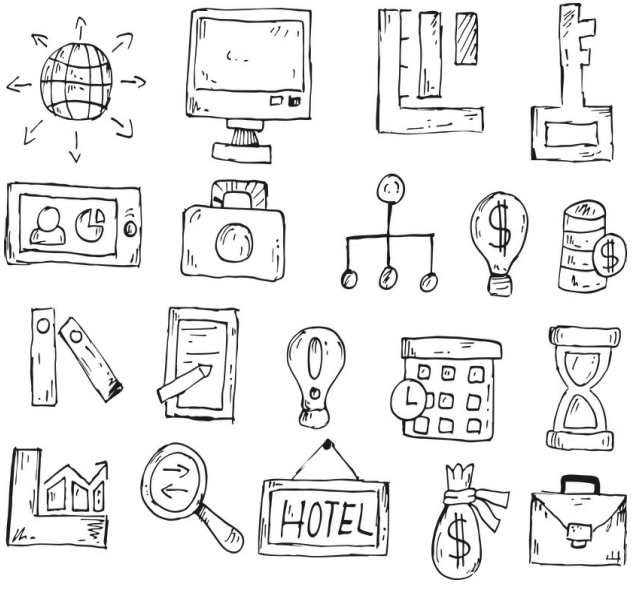
The 1960s-70s rebellions were partly directed against Fordism. Fordist jobs were monotonous, time-consuming, and boring. Mass consumption didn't really make people free or happy. Products were standardised and could also be boring. There wasn't much potential for individual expression. Writers like Marcuse (1964) and Debord (1967) portray Fordism as boring, rigid, authoritarian, and socially closed. Fordist societies were often rigidly stratified. There was a lot more upward mobility from the working-class to the middle-class than there is in neoliberalism. But it was still very rare. And racial and gender hierarchies were usually stricter than those of class. Mass production systems were reproduced in party politics, the military, schools, and so on. Young people resented the regimentation and coercion involved in schooling and conscription. The ecological effects of mass production were beginning to be noticed. Animal rights became a more prominent issue because of new practices such as factory farming. Some people started to feel Fordist lives were pointless, and to drop-out. The abundance and "social wage" of Fordist societies made dropping-out easier than it is today. Autonomists refer to this process of dropping-out as "exodus".

Fordism had also encouraged puritanical, socially conservative moralities. These moral values sustained obedience and compliance in regimented factories, schools and armies. They worked to counter the "indiscipline" of earlier workers who retained peasant habits or took part in working-class subcultures. Sex outside marriage, same-sex relationships, unmarried motherhood, anti-establishment beliefs, impoliteness, and alternative lifestyles were unpopular or prohibited. Compulsory schooling and military conscription became common. People who couldn't adapt to the new work rhythms might end up in secondary labour markets. Or they might end up in institutions like prisons or asylums. People with disabilities had little place in public life. They were either "cared for" out of sight in families or institutions, or employed in special sheltered workplaces. It's debatable whether they were worse- or better-off, because they also received disability benefits and weren't

expected to work. This austere morality peaked in the 1950s, the period which is now viewed as a golden age by many conservatives. It also found expression in fascism and Stalinism. But Fordism also relied on hedonism to sell products. Contradictions began to emerge between hedonism and austerity. And by the 1960s, austere morality was no longer attractive to young people. The system's moral authoritarianism produced backlashes in spheres such as sexual liberation, party/rave culture, gay rights, youth subcultures, and drug use. This was also important in the 1960s/70s revolutions.

Throughout this period, most professions remained formally outside the market economy. Professionals were paid good salaries, but they weren't expected to be economically useful or competitive. Nobody applied market principles to universities, schools, armies, prisons, lawyers, media, politicians, psychologists, or doctors. Culture started to be commodified at the level of sales, because individual artworks could now be reproduced on a mass scale. For example, millions of people might see the same movie, listen to the same piece or music, read the same book, or own printed posters of the same works of art. This commodification of art is critiqued by Frankfurt School writers such as Adorno (2005). Authors like Raymond Williams (1965) and Richard Hoggart (1957) also bemoan the ways in which autonomous working-class culture was replaced or contaminated by consumer goods. However, new art was still not produced on market or mass-production lines. Distinct working-class spheres, such as pubs and football matches, remained common.

In theory, there wasn't an attempt to reduce everything to capitalism. Scientists, journalists, scholars, doctors, judges, artists, sports players, and so on were meant to be objective and neutral. Or else they were meant to be guided by values specific to their professional sphere. In practice, all institutions became closely enmeshed in the general organisation of the Fordist state and society. Marxists in this period devoted a great deal of effort to showing how apparently neutral institutions actually serve capitalism in subtle ways. Schools and universities were meant to be neutral, but actually, they played a big role in sorting people into different social classes. Police and soldiers were meant to be neutral, but actually, they were used to uphold the dominant system. This is an important limit to the extent to which different spheres were autonomous. Marxists generally said that spheres were at best "relatively" autonomous. They were controlled by capitalism in the last instance. However, Offe (1984) argues that the welfare state had a decommodifying role. It removed certain sectors of the economy from the logic of production for the market. This was done in the interests of stabilising capitalism and profits overall. Nonetheless, it created spaces which had relative autonomy from capital.



Most of the world is no longer Fordist. This is because the Fordist system went into crisis in the 1970s. Marxists generally argue that particular models of capitalism rise and fall in sequences (see below, 745-6). Fordism is generally considered to have ended somewhere between the 1970s and the 1990s. Its ability to generate profits for capitalists went into crisis. Neoliberalism replaced Fordism as the main form of capitalism. Neoliberalism is a term for the revival and refurbishment of nineteenth-century economic liberal ideas. These ideas were based on the view that healthy markets have low levels of state and social restriction. Businesses should be left to do what they like – a doctrine called *laissez-faire*. Keynesian economic policies, high spending on social welfare, protectionism, and import substitution industrialisation are strongly discouraged. Neoliberalism does not necessarily involve political liberalism or social liberalism. It is compatible with strong, tyrannical states like Pinochet's Chile, provided the state's role in the economy is limited. It is also sometimes referred to as "market fundamentalism" or "hyper-capitalism". A few nation-states, like North Korea and Bhutan, have successfully resisted globalisation. Others, such as China, have only partially implemented it.

Neoliberal approaches are very different from the interventionist policies which created a "social wage" under Fordism. The core of the neoliberal project was to roll back the social-democratic reforms associated with Fordism. Thatcher in Britain and Reagan in America were among the pioneers of neoliberalism, along with dictators such as Pinochet in Chile. Most Marxists see neoliberalism as a rollback of previous victories for progressive movements. Some also see it as a shift towards immaterial, affective, or cognitive labour.

Autonomists in particular associate neoliberalism with precarity. This is a new way of subordinating workers through the insecurity of work and life (see below, 624-6). In some autonomist accounts, workers overthrew Fordism by slacking-off and dropping-out.

Because exploitation was concentrated in the workplace, it could be resisted by refusing to work. The 1960s/70s rebellions are thus an 'exodus' from Fordist capitalism. Capitalism responded by chasing people into the world outside work. This world is now criss-crossed with indirectly value-producing activities and types of labour. Capitalism defeated the exodus by chasing it from the factory into the wider social world. For instance, according to Griziotti, new technologies in the late-Fordist period made workers harder to control. Initially, this led to New Left politics with socialist-humanist values. Later, capital used these technologies to fragment workers. It uses communication technologies and global production chains to undermine workers' sense of belonging to a particular place or sector. This leads both to a sense that 'anything is possible' and a sense of being 'lacking in berths where one can only be in transit or left adrift' (Griziotti, 2019:155). Nomadism ceases to be emancipatory, because 'we all have to be global nomads these days or we're failures' (James, 2016:32).

The process of increased instability and destabilisation of meaning has a different position for autonomists than it does for Bhabha. According to Berardi, capitalism has itself become random and lost all fixed meanings. In earlier stages, capitalism established a law of value based on exploitation of labour. Today, however, the law of value has largely collapsed. There is no longer any clear relationship between the value of products and the

amount of labour involved in making them. As a result, capitalism becomes post-representational. 'Semiocapitalism occupies the sphere of randomness of value, as well as the sphere of randomness of law and of moral judgement' (Berardi, 2016:76). This randomness intersects with strategies such as Bhabha's, indicating similarities between the latter and the former.

"Globalisation" is a similar but distinct term to "neoliberalism". Globalisation refers to intensified global connections. People and economic activities are increasingly connected worldwide, without regard for national borders. Globalisation is said to involve 'intensifying connections between states and people' (Barnett and Duvall, 2005: 1). In the economic sphere, globalisation includes global production chains and global financial systems. Globalisation means that production chains are global and products are produced for global markets. For example, iPhones are manufactured by subcontractors in China and then sold all over the world, by an American company. The rise of global-scale institutions like the IMF and the UN is also sometimes seen as part of globalisation. But globalisation also refers to processes such as cultural exchange, global media coverage, migration, global ecological impacts, and the rise of the internet. These processes are seen to create a changed reality which is sometimes said to justify or require neoliberal policies. Neoliberals often refer to neoliberalism as "globalisation" or justify it by reference to "globalisation". International institutions like the IMF, World Bank, and WTO have played an important role in imposing neoliberalism worldwide.

In practice, it is very difficult to separate globalisation from neoliberalism. The word "globalisation" is most frequently used by neoliberal and Third Way writers such as Kenichi Ohmae, David Held, Anthony Giddens, Kevin Kelly, and Manuel Castells. These authors argue that globalisation makes older Fordist policies impossible or counterproductive. For example, Thomas Friedman argued that globalisation has led to a "flat world". Economic flows now operate everywhere, without significant barriers. Some critics, known as "globalisation sceptics", question whether this story about globalisation

is true. They argue that globalisation has always been a feature of capitalism. Furthermore, today's globalisation has not destroyed nation-states. Rather, neoliberalism is a particular political project. There are also sceptics within the pro-globalisation camp. Some liberals argue that there is a governance deficit in globalised societies. In other words, there's a lack of global-scale norms and institutions to regulate the flows which have been globalised. This lack of governance leads to new global disorder and inequity. There is also debate over whether globalisation has undermined cultural diversity. Opposition to globalisation can come from both sides of the political spectrum. Roundabout 2000, most left-wing social movements would be classified as anti-globalisation. Today, however, it's more common for right-wing movements to be viewed in this way.

Neoliberal Policies

Neoliberalism focuses on removing barriers to trade and investment. It seeks to eliminate protectionism so as to increase trade. It also tries to reduce "rent extraction" or transfers from the market to other social actors, such as states and the poor. Neoliberal governments typically pursue austerity policies to reduce social spending. They privatise

state-owned industries and services. They deregulate trade, investment and financial flows so that these are under market rather than state control. They practice free trade with other countries and usually sign up to free trade agreements and free trade areas. They generally try to increase the role of the market in the national economy and society. Neoliberal theorists (such as Friedrich Hayek, Milton Friedman, and Robert Nozick) generally reject the modifications made to classical liberal economics by the social-democratic, Keynesian, developmental, orthodox communist, and other approaches in the twentieth century. They effectively roll back economics to a period before Marx and Keynes.

Some scholars believe that neoliberalism was introduced in response to a declining rate of profit in industry. Neoliberalism was a way to squeeze more profit out of existing workers by reducing wages and intensifying exploitation (Volscho, 2016). However, neoliberalism has only raised profits in the financial sector. It has led to declining profits in the productive sector (Wade, 2008:11). Some Marxists, like Brenner (2002) and Harvey (2003), maintain that capitalism is stuck in an ongoing crisis which started in the 1970s. This crisis is concealed by the artificial inflation of global wealth through financial processes.

In economic scholarship, neoliberals are usually "neoclassicists". This means that they generate cybernetic models of economic behaviour based on classical liberal economic assumptions. For instance, they assume that everyone is a rational, self-interested actor and try to arrange systems so that actors assumed to think this way will produce particular outcomes. According to Mirowski (2018), neoliberals view the market as better at processing information than any possible human actor. They thus use it as a kind of arbiter of truth and value. They believe, for instance, that any interference in markets automatically reduces efficiency by interfering with incentives. Neoclassical economics has largely destroyed other approaches and dominates economics departments at universities, as well as powerful organisations like the IMF and World Bank.

Neoclassical economics depends on the idea that people are economically rational actors. It also tends to assume that people have perfect information on which to base decisions. And it assumes that there is always competition among different companies, so that bad practices by any one company are punished by the market. None of these claims are true in practice. The impact of capitalism in particular contexts runs up against people's real motives. For example, it's filtered through local cultures and moral economies (Rew and Khan, 2006:104). This is an example of what Bhabha calls the "time-lag". If people don't respond in the expected, "rational" way to incentives, then neoliberal policies will often have unintended effects. Also, information is often uneven. And there are monopolies, where one company controls the sector, or oligopolies, where a group of cooperating companies control the sector, in a lot of different areas. This is particularly true of the high-tech sectors where the former imperial countries make a lot of their profits (Harvey, 2003:130). Neoclassicists know that people aren't really thoroughly rational. But they expect that people are rational enough of the time that their models still work as representations of reality. But there's a lot of circumstances where neoclassical assumptions don't apply well enough. Departing from neoliberal policies can improve economic performance in these cases (Krugman, 1986).

The official idea behind neoliberalism is "comparative advantage". If each country specialises in doing what it does best (or least-worst), everyone produces more and everyone is better-off. On the other hand, if countries use protectionism, they focus on doing things they aren't so good at. This makes everyone worse-off. Production by comparative advantage leads to a condition known as "Pareto-optimality". This means that no possible change in production could lead to greater efficiency. Advocates of neoliberalism see its value as an established economic fact (see Ikenberry, 2010; Williamson, 1993). This is seen by opponents as dangerous closed-mindedness, triumphalism and hubris (Chang and Grabel, 2004:1).

Neoliberals try to present their policies both as generally beneficial for everyone, and as a *fait accompli* to which "there is no alternative". For example, they often conflate neoliberalism with globalisation or modernisation. Neoliberal policies are portrayed as just adapting to new realities of a changed world. In his book *Capitalist Realism*, Mark Fisher (2009) argues that neoliberalism promotes an ideology that claims that neoliberalism itself is the only reality. In the neoliberal period, powerful groups have sought to narrow people's sense of what is possible or even thinkable. They have sought to make neoliberalism an outer frame within which projects are articulated. It isn't so much that people don't want anything the system can't provide. It's that they perform a "pragmatic adjustment" of accepting that the neoliberal system is here to stay whether we like it or not. The Third Way accepts this logic absolutely. Other strands of the left have become increasingly melancholic in the face of this ideology. The theme of "impossibility" has become prevalent, instead of desires for other worlds (Brown, 1999). Critics argue that there is now a need to expand our sense of what is possible (Idle and Milburn, 2018).

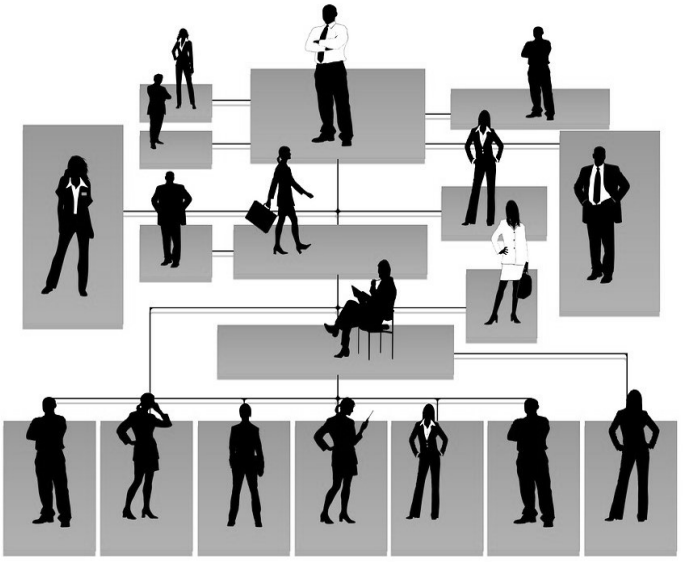
Neoliberalism seeks to remove barriers to capitalist activity. Problems like poverty are blamed on interference in the market. Neoliberal policies, such as those imposed through Structural Adjustment Policies, seek to remove barriers to economic activity. A great importance is placed on so-called macroeconomic stability. This refers to stable control of things like inflation and interest rates. Generally, governments achieve macroeconomic stability by having low taxes and low spending. Neoliberalism also includes "labour market flexibility". This means making it easier for companies to fire workers, cut pay, and hire people in bad conditions or on precarious contracts. This strengthens the position of transnational companies operating in poor countries.

In its pure form, neoliberalism values economic efficiency over everything else. It largely ignores problems like environmental destruction, social inequality, and poverty. However, neoliberalism does not necessarily involve a reduced role for the state. States can play aggressive roles in creating conditions to attract capital and repressing social movements. But the scope of state intervention is reduced. In general, states have withdrawn from large areas they used to finance or control. Many of the old state-owned industries have been privatised. Some of them have collapsed. Others have laid-off a lot of workers. Public utilities and services have been privatised or contracted-out. The ones still under state control are subjected to market-imitating cybernetic performance regimes. Measures such as price controls and import quotas have been phased out. State spending on health has decreased and become more fragmented. This initially led to claims that nation-states were being rolled back or even disappearing. On the whole, however, they've just changed their roles. They now see their main role as being to attract transnational capital.

Today, states seek to make money mainly by attracting transnational capital and then extracting "rents", or money capitalists have to pay to operate (Brenner, 1998). Neoliberalism was meant to stop rent-seeking. But it hasn't. However, states have become less interested in their domestic economies and populations. They have become increasingly outward-oriented. They aim to attract investment rather than to strengthen the national economy or integrate national populations. This has variously been termed glocalisation and denationalisation (Swyngedouw, 1997; McMichael, 1995; Sassen, 2008; Soja, 1992; Slater, 2004). States also increasingly imitate market models in their internal functioning. In some of the most marginal countries, such as many of those in Africa, the state was already mainly oriented to external flows of aid, trade and loans in the Fordist period. The existing external-oriented elite simply rebranded itself. It shifted from crony statism to crony capitalism, or dressed itself up as private companies and NGOs. At the same time, informal and illicit activities multiplied. The formal state is now often a front for informal elites which straddle the boundary between the licit and illicit economies. In India, Chatterjee (2006:98) argues that transnational capital, or "Empire" in Hardt and Negri's sense, now rules. The state has actually lost power to "Empire".

Taxes have also been reduced. In principle, neoliberal states are meant to reduce spending. However, in practice, state spending has not necessarily gone down. Savings due to cuts in services, wages and benefits are offset by increasing costs of repression and state investments to attract capital. Neoliberal states are therefore constantly short of money. States have replaced part of their income from taxes with loans from banks. Neoliberal states seem to be in a permanent situation of deficit financing (spending more than they bring in) and resultant debt. Debt and credit have also become more important to individuals and companies. Lending has bridged the gap between capitalism's need for consumer spending and its low wages. This has made individuals, as well as states, increasingly vulnerable to banks' lending priorities and risk profiles (see Gill, 1995; Graeber, 2011; Escalate Collective, 2011).

At the state level, deficit financing (i.e. taking out loans) means that banks and lending organisations like the IMF can often dictate government policy, bypassing democracy. The situation in Greece following the 2008 financial crisis is a case in point. The population repeatedly rejected austerity policies in elections and referenda. But the IMF and the EU bullied the elected government into implementing these policies anyway. In 2002, the left-wing Workers' Party (PT) was about to win an election in Brazil. It ran on a platform opposing neoliberalism. Financiers panicked and started to withdraw investments from Brazil. In response, the PT leader Lula reversed his policy on the eve of the election. In most cases, politicians don't even dare to challenge neoliberalism to begin with. Voters only get to choose between different neoliberal parties. As a result of such examples, neoliberalism has been criticised as anti-democratic. It gives banks and foreign investors a veto on government policies (Mkandawire, 1999; DeMartino, 1999; Harrison, 2002). This situation empties elections of economic content. This has variously been called "polyarchy", "'low-intensity democracy", and "post-politics" (Robinson, 1996; Gills et al., 1993; Lentin, 2012; Wilson and Swyngedouw, 2014).



The attempt to make neoliberalism seem inevitable has not always been successful. Neoliberalism was the main target of the anti-capitalist movement, which peaked in 1999-2001. In addition, SAPs and economic crises often led to uprisings in the global South. For example, the Zapatista uprising in Chiapas, Mexico, in 1994 was a response to the imposition of a free trade area. The Argentine economic crash of 2001 led to massive social mobilisations which brought down several governments. Workers' councils and neighbourhood assemblies were set up. In West Papua, which is occupied by Indonesia, locals often protest against extractive industries. In the Niger Delta, local subsistence agriculture has been undermined by oil production, including land grabs and oil spills. This has led to recurring protests and insurgencies. In Bolivia, resistance to water privatisation and elimination of petrol price controls led to massive protests which brought down governments. Bolivia was forced to abandon the neoliberal economic model. Similar protests are common to this day. For example, in Indonesia, people are protesting the seizure of their land to build an airport. In Thailand, people are protesting a similar land grab for luxury development. In Russia, people are protesting increases in the retirement age. In Morocco, people are protesting precarious work and deaths in mines. In South Africa, residents of informal settlements often block roads to protest demolitions or demand services. In Brazil, landless people occupy empty farms. In Haiti, mass revolts against neoliberal policies break out periodically.

Effects of Neoliberalism

Internationally, neoliberalism was spread under the name "Washington Consensus" (see Gore, 2000; Chang and Grabel, 2004; Wade, 2008). This involved a new supposed consensus among economists that neoliberal policies bring economic growth. In fact, the evidence involved was highly contested. There was never a consensus in international political economy, development studies, or sociology. But neoliberalism became a consensus doctrine among institutions like the IMF, the World Bank, the WTO, the EU,

the US government, and private banks, and in academic economics departments. Neoliberalism is not just a shift from state-led to market-led development. It involves a sweeping change in the way people think about the goals and means of development (Gore, 2000:789). Under Fordism, development meant a range of things, including increasing welfare, economic diversification, and the strengthening of the national economy. Under neoliberalism, development is taken to mean economic growth. Economic growth is taken to mean increased efficiency and productivity, and increased GDP (gross domestic product). This is a measure of the value, in money, of all the goods and services produced in a particular country. In neoliberalism, GDP is taken to measure the wealth of a country and how well it is developing. A country develops successfully if its GDP increases. Quantitative statistics based on GDP tend to show that neoliberalism is effective. It leads to economic growth and it reduces poverty (see Winters et al., 2004).

A first difficulty with this picture is that benefits may be political. There is a pattern that countries, companies and individuals who comply with the neoliberal agenda get better results. But does this mean that neoliberalism is objectively effective in improving economic performance? Or does it just mean that powerful actors are rewarding others for compliance? Radical scholars tend to argue the second of these points (Soederberg, 2004; Gowan, 1999; Harvey, 2003). Neoliberalism is seen as a political project, rather than an inevitable effect of technological change (Konings and Panitch, 2008; Amin, 1985:45-53). Neoliberal policies make poor countries more popular with western investors and governments. They are often implemented alongside loans and aid. It's almost impossible to figure out whether growth happens because of the structural reforms or the money to which they are tied. Also, neoliberalism is a result of particular decisions by elite actors. It is not a system of mutual cooperation, but a hierarchical system in which the power of transnational capital is primary (Gore, 2000) and the USA remoulds the world in its own image (Konings and Panitch, 2008). Globalisation or modernisation might simply involve imposing this ideology of corporate power. Critics accuse supporters of neoliberalism of 'hubris' and 'closed-mindedness', and argue that 'the “no alternative” dictum is

dangerously incorrect' (Chang and Grabel, 2004:1). The pursuit of an information society is seen as a way to undermine the power of workers and social movements. Cybernetic "soft control" is central to this practice of re-establishing authority (Terranova, 2004).

Also, narrowing the definition of development makes these accounts largely circular. A lot is ignored in these accounts, because a lot of things aren't measured. For example, free state-provided benefits, informal support from family or neighbours, unexploited ecological resources, subsistence economies, and in most cases also informal economies do not count towards GDP. The more things are commodified, the more GDP seems to rise – even if it's just the same things being sold off or going up in value. If people used to have free public transport, and have to start paying, this makes GDP go up. If a company spills oil and the government spends billions of dollars cleaning it up, this also makes GDP go up. If investors buy empty houses or land, and the prices of houses or land go up, this makes GDP go up. On the other hand, if someone cuts down a forest, increasing the risk of climate change and robbing peasants of important resources, these losses have no effect on GDP.

Speculative bubbles also register as short-term GDP growth. A speculative bubble, or boom-bust cycle, is a situation where a particular product or group of products becomes valued a lot over its real value. This happens because investors speculate on its future value. They expect greater profits than they actually get. Bubbles end in crashes, in which the value of the product declines dramatically – like a literal bubble popping. Bubbles are a lot more common in neoliberalism than in Fordism. History and long-term effects are also invisible from simple comparisons of GDP. Marxists in particular emphasise that history is important. Two countries implementing the same policy will experience different effects because the context is different. For example, deregulation of trade will produce economic benefits for a country which has already built up viable competitive industries. But it will not benefit a country which only has primary products and inefficient industries. In many ways, neoliberalism rigs the evidence by focusing on GDP growth. Because GDP growth

partly measures the extent to which an economy is commodified, evidence that neoliberalism promotes development is partly circular. It proves that commodification causes commodification. There's also the massive problem that the proportion of fictitious to real capital has increased under neoliberalism (see below, 650-1). The creation of large quantities of financial capital exaggerates GDP growth.

Even in GDP terms, the impact of neoliberalism is contestable. Global economic growth has been lower in the neoliberal period than it was in the Fordist period (Chang and Grabel, 2004:114-15). Some countries, especially in Africa, have not grown at all or have actually declined. The global South's share of the world's wealth has decreased in the neoliberal period (Wade, 2008:19). Any gains from increased trade mostly go to the global North (Ferguson, 1990). The rate of profit of non-financial companies has also declined steeply (Wade, 2008:11). A few countries, like China and India, have got richer on average. But the effects of this are partly offset by internal inequality and other problems. Importantly, the countries which have succeeded are often countries which resisted full implementation of neoliberalism until quite late in the neoliberal period. They insisted on developing new industries before fully opening up to the world economy. Even today, China isn't completely open. For example, the state controls banking and currency values, and subsidises sectors it wants to encourage.

Sometimes neoliberalism increases short-term profits in ways which reduce long-term profits. For example, it finances practices which undermine ecology and health, heavy fertiliser use which undermines land value in the long-run, and extractive industries which undermine long-term agricultural land use (Koenig and Tiemen, 1998). These will later lead to reduced profits, but neoliberalism encourages short-term profits. Neoliberalism places little or no value on ecological protection. Post-development and subsistence perspective approaches particularly focus on social and ecological problems with GDP growth. They argue that the imposition of economic growth as the main goal of life is very destructive in other ways. It exploits the poor and the environment for the benefit of the rich (Braun, 2006; Shiva, 1991; Mies and Bennholdt-Thomsen, 1999). Some authors call for "degrowth", or the reversal of economic growth. They contrast growth with sustainability.

In areas other than GDP, the effects of neoliberalism are mainly negative. A neoliberal economy is usually less stable than a Fordist economy. Rapid financial flows lead to periodic economic crises and crashes. For example, in the early 1990s it looked like neoliberal reform had been successful in Mexico. GDP had increased. But the boom ended in a massive crisis in 1994. In retrospect, it's fairly clear that the apparent success of neoliberalism was just a speculative bubble. Qualitative evidence – coming from interviews and observations of people affected by neoliberal policies – reaches opposite conclusions to quantitative evidence. It generally shows that neoliberalism makes people poorer and more unhappy (Sumner and Tiwali, 2005). Even if their cash incomes rise, the poor become poorer. They lose access to state services, free or cheap land, subsidised goods, and other social support mechanisms (Murphy, 2000). Neoliberalism also undermines qualitative values because it tends to standardise conditions of life (Ritzer, 1996; Volti, 2011).

Structural Adjustment and Stages of Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism was imposed on most poor and middle-income countries by means of Structural Adjustment Policies (SAPs). These are policies imposed by the IMF, World Bank and other agencies as conditions for receiving loans, loan write-offs, or aid. A lot of the former colonies had become aid- or debt-dependent by the 1980s. Governments afraid of economic collapse submitted to SAPs to keep up the flow of money. SAPs mostly affected former colonies in the global South. But even countries like Greece and Britain have suffered from SAPs. Instead of just giving loans or aid, SAPs impose "conditionalities". These are changes demanded as conditions for the loans or aid. Economists at the World Bank and IMF draw up lists of policies they want changed or implemented. For example, they might demand that state-owned companies should be privatised, that workers should be laid-off, or that restrictions on imports should be repealed. These conditionalities usually follow a specific template which was the same for every country at a particular time (Yi Chong, 2005; Cammack, 2002). In the 1980s-90s, they gave western powers extensive control of the governments and economies of poor countries.

Initially, SAPs exclusively focused on neoliberal economic reforms. They encouraged a strategy of export-led development. Poor countries were encouraged to produce cheap exports for foreign markets. Usually, this meant exporting to the west. Former colonies had often been forced into specialising in primary goods exports. They'd begun to change this through state-led industrialisation strategies in the 1960s-70s. However, neoliberalism forced the reversal of these policies. Some countries deindustrialised or went back to just producing primary commodities. In other words, the old colonial division of labour among countries in the world economy has been partially rebuilt. Critics have called this recolonisation or reperipheralisation (Raghavan, 1990; Soederberg, 2001). Some even talk about the formation of a transnational state in the form of international agencies like the IMF (Germain, 2002).

By the mid-1990s, the social and environmental impacts of neoliberalism were increasingly visible. This led to a shift to what was called the "post-Washington Consensus". This largely retained, but also modified, neoliberal policies. Sometimes, the post-Washington Consensus simply rebranded old neoliberal policies as socially beneficial. For example, pro-capitalist reforms were rebranded as "poverty reduction" policies because economic growth is meant to reduce poverty. In other cases, existing policies were modified and new conditionalities added. For example, the World Bank continued to promote privatisation. But it became increasingly concerned that privatised companies should be regulated for the public good. Charging for health and education was no longer encouraged. Another part of this doctrine is an exaggerated emphasis on education, therapy, and moral commitment as panaceas for the problems of neoliberalism. Also, new conditionalities were imposed relating to "governance", for instance, anti-corruption, democratisation, human rights, workers' rights, poverty relief, environmental protection, gender equality, and other social issues. These conditionalities may have had some effect on democratisation in the 1990s. But they had little effect on the general social impact of neoliberalism. Governments often paid lipservice to these conditions or passed laws which

they didn't enforce. Or the positive effects of social conditionalities were outweighed by the negative indirect effects of neoliberalism on the same areas. The post-Washington Consensus is closely linked to the Third Way. It shares many features of the "politics of perversion" (see above, 386-91). It offers incompatible things in the same package. It has been described as a rebranding, and as saving the core of neoliberalism by modifying its margins (Chang and Grabel, 2004:2).

For example, the World Bank promoted land redistribution policies without expropriation of large landowners. It encouraged governments to buy land and redistribute it to small farmers on market terms. This was based on the argument that small-scale farmers are more efficient. Non-redistributive land reform was implemented in countries like Brazil and Colombia, which have very unequal land distribution. But in practice, governments couldn't buy enough land. It tended to be richer, commercially oriented farmers who received the land. And the farmers the land was rented to were subject to unreasonable forms of control and debt. A lot couldn't raise the money they needed or couldn't keep up loan repayments. These policies to encourage land redistribution actually coincided with increased concentration of land ownership in the hands of the rich.

One variant of post-Washington Consensus theory, known as "developmental state theory", argues that states actually play a key role in capitalist development. States should try to build infrastructure and promote particular industries which will later become competitive. This theory is based on the successful development of countries like Japan, China, Taiwan, Singapore, and South Korea. Developmental state theory is explicitly constructed as an alternative to strict neoliberalism. It allows a limited degree of protectionism to help "infant" or newly developing industries. However, it maintains a focus on market growth as the criterion for successful policy. It promotes state authoritarianism to weaken labour movements and social resistance to capitalism. And it maintains that market processes should control most of the economy. Only a few strategic sectors should be excluded from the free market.

Another big shift in the 2000s was 'securitisation'. This is the process whereby particular issues are classified as exceptional, existential threats to security (Waever, 1998; Bigo, 2002). When something is securitised, it is removed from the sphere of normal politics. Exceptional measures are often permitted. This process intensified after 9/11. Everything from migration to disease to protest to cybercrime tended to be securitised by states. This has made neoliberalism more and more authoritarian. Securitisation has undermined many of the gains of democratisation and multiculturalism which were made in the late Fordist and early neoliberal periods. For example, western relations with Africa have become increasingly militarised in this period. With the rise of securitisation, cybernetic control has become more and more important. Strong state executives (often freed from legislative and judicial scrutiny) have re-emerged as powerful actors. The US in particular has sought "full spectrum dominance" – not just military control, but control over information, economics, culture, and so on.

Neoliberalism went into crisis again after the 2008 financial crash. It's no longer as widely supported as it was. But it remains the dominant model. The power of the IMF, World Bank, America, and American banks has decreased because of the rise of China. China is now almost as rich in total GDP terms as America (although it has a much larger population, so its per capita GDP is much lower). China is now offering loans, aid, trade and investment to other poor countries. It offers these without many conditionalities, and with a policy of "non-interference". And it sometimes makes offers above market value, to lock-in access to important resources. This means that governments can stand up to America and its allies. This has progressive effects in allowing governments to defy neoliberalism more easily. But it also undermines the power which social movements have gained on the back of post-Washington Consensus conditionalities. It allows governments to become even more authoritarian, corrupt, and environmentally destructive than they were before. Trade between China and poorer countries tends to reproduce the established patterns of trade between the west and its former colonies. Poorer countries provide raw materials to China, and China provides manufactured goods in return.

Features of the Neoliberal Economy

Neoliberalism both expands and changes aspects of Fordism. Some theorists, such as Bob Jessop, refer to neoliberalism as "post-Fordism". Others suggest that aspects of Fordism persist. In Stuart Hall's (1988:24) definition, post-Fordism has five main features. Firstly, new information technologies become economically important. Secondly, marketing focuses on smaller-scale, niche markets rather than standardised products. Thirdly, the service sector takes over from manufacturing as the leading economic sector. Fourthly, increasing numbers of women are employed. Fifthly, financial systems move to a global scale. Other authors emphasise different aspects of Fordism. For example, white-collar or skilled work has made a comeback according to some scholars. Niche marketing is sometimes associated with the emergence of new identities. Some scholars think that

flexibility has become more important for companies. Neoliberalism also involves extensions of information systems. Computers play an important role, both in making mass production even more efficient, and in facilitating high-speed global financial transactions. Some scholars, like Castells, go as far as to refer to an informational economy or informational mode of development.

Pro-capitalist scholars such as Manuel Castells (1996), Kevin Kelly (1994) and Kenichi Ohmae (1990) maintain that networked and localised aspects of production are important in post-Fordism. Markets either can no longer be regulated, or can only be regulated through incentives and "nudges". There are also arguments that techniques developed in Japan – sometimes termed "Toyotism", after the firm Toyota – have played a central role in neoliberalism. One example is just-in-time production, where companies only keep the bare minimum of resources needed for the things they have to produce. Another is *kaizen*, a management strategy which encourages workers to suggest improvements. Workers are rewarded for helping to make the work process more efficient. Cybernetic mechanisms such as feedback have been built into organising systems at both the workplace and consumption levels. Companies now present themselves as engaging in communication and partnership, rather than top-down command. The role of networks is played up both by pro-globalisation writers such as Castells, and Marxists such as Hardt and Negri.

Post-autonomist writers, such as Marazzi, Virno, Lazzarato, and Hardt and Negri, place an emphasis on the increasing role played by "immaterial" and/or "affective" labour in neoliberalism. Immaterial/affective labour refers to types of labour which manipulate thoughts, emotions, communication flows, networks, knowledge, and so on, rather than making physical products from material components. Rather than the rise of the service and financial sectors reflecting the concealment of real productive activity, these theorists take service labour to be a new form of value-production. Because of the growing use of complex machines, there is no longer a relationship between the input of particular workers and the wage they're paid. Immaterial labour relies more on collective knowledge

and social cooperation than it does on the labour put in by any particular worker. This means that the state has to replace the traditional wage relationship with arbitrary command. The state's actions start to seem like 'indiscriminate succession of acts of control' without any logic, reference-points or measure (Negri, 2005: 245).

Other Marxists, including Claus Offe (1985) and Lash and Urry (1987), define Fordism as "organised capitalism" and post-Fordism as "disorganised capitalism". Post-Fordism is disorganised in the sense that the state does not seek to regulate capital. Instead, it encourages high-speed, unregulated financial and investment flows. Lash and Urry argue that classes have become more fragmented since the end of capitalism. Not only the economy, but also the state and civil society are now more disorganised. Examples include precarious and temporary work, a growing informal sector, the decline of trade unions, the growing service sector and its new middle class, and the break-up of large corporate conglomerates. States are disorganised partly because the economy is globalised. States can no longer control or "organise" national capital because national capital has to respond to global markets. Cultural fragmentation and "postmodernity" are also aspects of disorganised capitalism. So is the tendency towards constant social transformations both "from above" and "from below". Many of these tendencies have persisted. However, big corporations now seem to have reappeared on a global rather than national scale. A few scholars go as far as to argue that there is now a transnational ruling class with a nascent transnational state (Sklair, 2001).

Baudrillard has a more cynical view of the same process. He believes that capitalism no longer produces things so much as it reproduces itself as a system. Most of the things it produces just exist to sustain the system itself. The process of immaterial production is just the system reproducing itself over and over. For example, consumer goods increasingly become marks of status rather than things people actually use and enjoy. People buy newer, or branded goods so as to show off their social status or identity. Other

theories include Bauman's (2000) idea of an increasingly atomised, "liquid" type of social connection, and Jameson's view of capitalism as postmodernity (see below, 842-7).

Pro-capitalist writers often emphasise the flattening effects of globalisation. However, the neoliberal economy is not globally even and smooth. It is an integrated system of production networks. There are hierarchies among the different production hubs. Most, but not all, of these follow the old coloniser-colonised or North-South lines. Whether power is held by transnational capital or Northern states, the effect is similar. Command and control functions in the world economy continue to be concentrated in the old centres of imperialist power, like London and New York. Development has been very uneven, even within countries. For example, the vast bulk of investment in China is concentrated in three relatively small urban clusters. Britain's New Economy is focused in London. There is a huge split between London and other areas such as Northern England. In some African countries, extractive hubs are almost entirely cut-off from the surrounding society. Fordist production was usually centralised. In contrast, current global production systems are fragmented. Each company specialises in a particular stage of the production process. So, the same product might go through different stages in different countries, overseen by different companies. A company making cars or computers probably buys most of the components from other companies, rather than producing them all in-house. This means that different stages of the production process are distributed among different countries with different levels of wages, skill, and so on.

Neoliberalism has led to the rise of global production chains. Transnational companies, mostly based in the old imperial countries, establish factories and mines producing goods all over the world. Or they subcontract to smaller companies. The result is that a single product gets made in several different places. Neoliberals expected that this process would improve workers' pay and conditions, because workers would move into the formal rather than informal sector and become more skilled and productive. In practice, however, power inequalities strongly advantage western-based transnational companies against local workers. Companies are very mobile and demand for goods is not constant. This means that companies will shop around for low-wage localities. And they will only hire workers on temporary contracts. Workers in global production chains are very vulnerable to global economic shifts. In countries specialising in low-wage production, globalisation encourages abusive forms of labour. For example, forced labour, prison labour and particularly exploitative types of child labour have all become more common (Busse, 2002). In factories producing for global markets, managers increase workrates and performance through various forms of coercion, surveillance, and abuse (see Chan and Pun, 2010).

Undocumented immigrants often provide a source of cheap labour. In some of the Gulf countries, the majority of the workforce is made up of migrants with precarious residence rights. In China, most of the people working in global production chains are recent migrants from rural to urban areas. They aren't legally supposed to be in the urban areas and don't have the same welfare rights as city residents. Attempts have been made to reduce the harm arising from globalised production by attacking companies' reputations. Most companies now have codes of conduct prohibiting various abuses in their production chains. But these measures have had little effect on realities on the ground. Transnational companies have plausible deniability for abuses committed by subcontractors.

One major feature of neoliberalism is precarity. This has been defined as non-self-determined insecurity (Raunig, 2004) or as a 'hell of the absence of guarantees' (Guattari and Negri, 1990:76). Precarity is a situation where 'life becomes contingent on capital and therefore precarious' (Mitropoulos, 2005). The rise of precarity has been described as an 'epochal recomposition of capital and labor' (Brophy and de Peuter, 2007: 177). Precarity has been analysed as a form of social control. It's a way to resubordinate labour through fear. It's tied-in with just-in-time production, global production networks, financialisation, and the break-up of labour into smaller and smaller packets. It's also associated with cuts in the social wage and the decline of stable, full-time jobs. Most jobs are now temporary, insecure, and badly-paid. People aren't all equally precarious. Some are more precarious than others. For instance, migrants are particularly affected by precarity (Mezzadra, 2007). But fear of precarity or disposability is pervasive in neoliberalism. Precarious workers are either idealised in New Economy discourses, or demonised as dangerous and self-excluded. Unions generally seek a return to something more like Fordism.

Precarious work has changed the rhythms of life more broadly. People lose the ability to plan their time because they're always on call or on the edge of breakdown. They're subject to 'yo-yo hours and days' (Tari and Vanni, 2005). There is a strong pressure to be communicable (Lazzarato, 1996). People don't have the time or reliability to sustain relationships. Social connections become more unstable, or break down completely. People also become psychologically over-aroused and unable to relax (Berardi, 2009). Some accounts link neoliberalism to rising anxiety (IPC, 2014). Being subject to constant performance monitoring and assessment is anxiety-inducing and overwhelming. It leads to burnout. People are also increasingly divided into different niches which don't easily combine into broad social movements. When movements (such as the Arab Spring) happen, they're often catalysed by lightning-rod incidents which bring together people with very diverse grievances and desires. The combination of precarity, with its impact on experiences of time, and pragmatic adjustment is destructive of affirmative desires. Many people lose the capacity to imagine anything beyond neoliberal precarity (Berlant, 2007). Some scholars argue that precarity isn't new. It's just expanded from existing secondary labour markets into formerly protected sectors. However, there seem to be significant differences in the organisation of labour under Fordism and neoliberalism which this view underestimates.

Another major shift is McDonaldisation. Advocates of the New Economy expected it to lead to increasingly complex, diversified, and autonomous forms of labour. This was predicted, for instance, based on patterns in early computerised work where programmers had a lot of autonomy. But in reality, tendencies to McDonaldisation are stronger than those towards autonomy (Prujit, 2002:439). In the neoliberal period, workplaces have become more standardised (Vallas, 1999; Prujit, 2002). McDonald's is a classic example. Workers are required to prepare the same meals over and over, to a rigid script specified down to the level of the exact number of seconds something is in the oven (Ritzer, 1996:32, 105-6). Workers are treated as cogs in the corporate machine (Noon et al., 2013:140). In some ways, McDonald's is to neoliberalism what Ford was to Fordism.

McDonaldisation has crept up the economic structure from sites such as call centres and retail outlets, into areas like healthcare and education. People subjected to these kinds of processes report that they feel 'emptied of self' (Ritzer, 1996:117).

In some ways, McDonaldisation is just the latest step in a process of rationalisation and intensified control seen throughout capitalism. It's an updated version of Taylorism, and of processes of deskilling observed much earlier by Marx. These processes will arguably be deepened by current shifts such as the Quantified Self Movement (Moore and Robinson, 2016). However, there is also a tendency to see workers in psychological terms. For example, Human Resource Management often focuses on relationships of workers to managers. There are also little niches of autonomous, high-value labour in a few sectors. But they're the exception.

Markets in neoliberalism have become extremely volatile. According to Harvey (2003:61), there is now nine times as much "fictitious", financial capital in circulation than there is productive capital. In other words, banks are lending about nine times as much money as is being made from selling products. They only have a 1 in 9 chance of making back their investment. This situation encourages speculative activity with a lot of "bubbles" and "boom and bust" cycles. Investors will invest in large numbers in a new sector or market, and then suddenly withdraw money in large quantities. This causes recurring, usually localised, economic crises like the Argentine collapse of 2001 and the East Asian financial

crisis of 1997. Some authors, such as Harvey, Panitch and Gindin, believe that particular actors can manipulate and generate these crises and speculative booms. In particular, a small elite of American statesmen, bankers, and heads of intergovernmental agencies can direct market trends by sending messages which are taken up by investors. These actors, according to Harvey, are powerful enough 'to make or break many weaker foreign economies' just by shifting their lending policies (2003:129). This can be done regardless of whether the economy is strong or not (2003:132). Critics see this situation as a kind of dependency of poorer countries created through debt (Panitch and Gindin, 2004).

The effects on North-South relations have generally been negative. Industrial production has largely moved to the global South, the former colonies. This looks a bit like empowerment, because the old goal of industrialisation has been achieved. There's also a small emerging elite of rich Southern capitalists. But the former colonisers continue to take most of the profits. They do this through control of finance and capital markets, through intellectual property laws, and through the location of command-and-control hubs in established cities like New York and London.

Social and Political Effects

Socially, neoliberalism has increased inequality. The powerful have become stronger and the weak have become weaker. Global production systems are also highly unequal and global inequality has increased. Inequality has increased sharply, both within and between countries (e.g. Cornea, 2003). Neoliberalism undermines labour. It undermines wages and non-wage incomes. Workers' bargaining position has been undermined. Unions are much weaker than they were under Fordism. Workers can be hired and fired very easily – even for trivial reasons, including actions outside the workplace. (This has been manipulated in social media campaigns from both left and right, to leverage public outrage to get

opponents fired). Workers even struggle to enforce the legal rights they have on paper. Neoliberalism has increased social inequality everywhere. Even countries which have economically grown (such as China) have experienced increased inequality. Generally, neoliberalism has regressively redistributed wealth upwards, from poorer and middling groups to the super-rich.

Politically, the loss of "corporatist" systems of social inclusion (based on extensive welfare or patronage) has had drastic effects. Previously dominant ideologies have gone into decline. Social democracy, Christian democracy, left-leaning developmental nationalism, and orthodox communism have declined sharply. In the early days of neoliberalism, individualism and cosmopolitan consumerism were quite widespread. Multiculturalism was also popular. Opposition was concentrated in drop-out subcultures and countercultures, and the traditional left. However, the New Right which initiated neoliberalism also articulated an ideology known as authoritarian populism (Hall et al., 1978). This ideology blamed social problems on the libertarian effects of 1960s-70s social movements and on various social outgroups. The New Right sought to restore order through repression, authoritarian measures, and a return to tradition. In Britain, this was partly channelled through the xenophobia and scapegoating common in the popular press. In America, it was connected to the rise of the Christian right. Another aspect of the ideology was "penal populism". People were encouraged to focus on crime and deviance, and to blame "soft" liberal or social-democratic regimes for social breakdown. Attitudes became increasingly punitive. Wacquant (2009) links neoliberalism to mass imprisonment in America. Social instability increased because of welfare cuts and unemployment. The state responded by punishing increasing numbers of poor people.

Social democrats initially opposed the New Right but struggled to articulate alternatives. They mostly mutated into the Third Way. This was an ideological current which accepted the broad outlines of neoliberalism but sought to supplement it with socially progressive policies. In practice, the main effects of the Third Way were to increase the belief that "there is no alternative" and to discredit the left. In the 2000s, a new wave of right-wing governments emerged around the ideas of neoconservatism. This was when securitisation took root in earnest. After the 2008 financial crisis, discourses have again fragmented. The neoconservatives and Third Way have generally suffered large losses in credibility and electoral support. Governments continue to be largely neoliberal. But there is growing support for extreme right-wing populists and fascists, who claim to be anti-neoliberal in certain ways. There has also been a revival of radical left political parties and an increase in militant identity politics. Another trend is the emergence of small-scale, affinity-based political movements. Autonomous social movements seem to have emerged in the context where Fordism was declining. They have the most appeal among people who are both formally educated and socially marginalised. Similar, networked movements of the worst-off sometimes exist simply as survival networks. Others take reactionary forms. For example, Islamist movements have proliferated among the most marginalised groups. Gangs are also a common way for the poorest people to band together.

During Fordism, states obtained social support or passivity mainly through wealth redistribution, patronage, welfare provision, and developmental nationalism. This basis was undermined by neoliberalism. Indeed, people's connection to the national state is increasingly irrelevant to their activities in global production chains or informal/subsistence economies. States have responded through increasing appeals to other types of nationalism and populism (Ong, 1996; Appadurai, 2006; Zhao, 1998). Southern countries typically claim to be standing up to western dominance by developing independently. But in fact, they implement global neoliberalism. Northern countries instead use authoritarian populism. Various conflicts about cultural issues and minority rights take over from debates about economic policy as the main focus of political competition. Amin (1985:51) has argued that this reflects the lack of government control over economics. Because economics no longer happens on a national scale, it has escaped from democratic politics. Instead, elections focus on issues of moral control and populism.

The backlash against multiculturalism has been said to reflect anxieties about 'the disrupting, disembedding character of contemporary neoliberal globalization and the governability of increasingly fragmented, transnationalized societies' (Grillo, 2007: 993). Neoliberals used xenophobia and scapegoating as means to sustain support for neoliberal governments from the 1980s to the 2000s. This did this by blaming the social effects of neoliberalism on moral collapse and socially liberal or social-democratic values. Social effects of neoliberalism are often blamed on deviants and out-groups. For example, there is a widespread sense that community and decent treatment of others has broken down. This is a predictable effect of the loss of collective rights and an increasingly desperate struggle to survive. But it's usually perceived as either individual or social-scale moral collapse. It's meant to be solved by punitive measures like locking up more people or deporting immigrants. Such discourses aid social control by deflecting attention from neoliberalism itself. But, these strategies of control have partly backfired. Once in the public mind, right-wing populist themes take on a life of their own. In recent years, right-

wing populism and fascism have been resurgent. In some ways, this just involves the old scapegoating themes of New Right and neoconservative discourse, intensified to an even more dangerous degree.

The impact of neoliberalism on women has been debated. On the one hand, advocates of neoliberalism argue that it has improved job opportunities for women. More women now have jobs than during Fordism. Certain sectors of the economy have been 'feminised' – employing women instead of men (Standing, 1999; Cerruti, 2000; Cagatay et al., 1995). The percentage of women in the workforce has gone up. However, inequalities persist. Women are still employed mainly in secondary labour markets. Feminisation is a way to shift formerly protected sectors into the secondary market. Low-wage employers sometimes prefer to hire women because they can get away with paying lower wages. Bosses often replace well-paid male workers with hyperexploited women or migrants (Chan et al., 2013:103; Ong, 2010). Feminisation is usually reversed if a country moves towards skilled labour (Berik, 2000). And there is a corresponding trend towards 'feminisation of poverty'. Women are becoming poorer, faster than men are (e.g. Olefumi, 2000; Scott, 1985; Tvedtan et al., 2008).

There is also an anti-feminist backlash due to neoliberalism. Neoliberal ideology hasn't undermined traditional gender norms. The “male breadwinner model” promoted in the

nineteenth century is still widespread. In fact, neoliberalism often legitimises itself through nationalism and traditionalism. But men can no longer earn enough to be breadwinners. This, combined with increased women's employment, has led to women being scapegoated for the effects of neoliberalism (Radhakrishnan and Solari, 2015). However, the Italian feminist group Prec@s have found that young women mostly don't want a return to Fordist "security". They associate Fordism with male dominance and unpaid domestic labour. Instead, they seek autonomy and creativity (Fantone, 2006).

One of the most noticeable aspects of neoliberalism is the extension of capitalist ways of thinking and acting to more and more spheres of social life. Increasing proportions of social life are now "commodified", or sold as commodities for profit. Examples include "intellectual property", science, culture, gene patenting, education, private security, sport, leisure, and data. And things which aren't directly commodified are treated in cybernetic or market-like ways. For example, "New Public Management" involves running public services as if they were private corporations. It relies heavily on managerial autonomy and statistical targets. It emphasises customer feedback, value for money, and efficiency. It tends to turn service users into "customers", undermine workers' conditions, and intensify bureaucratic performance management. Capitalist ways of thinking and organising have been extended into areas which used to be less affected. For example, schools and universities are now explicitly designed to produce workers for the labour market. And formerly autonomous spheres are increasingly run to maximise profit. Even the production of new TV shows is sometimes directly determined by market-driven algorithms (Hallinan and Striphas, 2014). One side-effect of commodification is the spread of corruption. For example, people who see education as an economic resource will try to "buy" qualifications. Such processes undermine the effectiveness of services and the reliability of indicators (Tadros, 2006; Stewart, 2002).

There is some debate about whether or not cultures and lifestyles are being homogenised. People are increasingly exposed to the same products, media, and state policies all over the

world. But at the same time, niche markets have multiplied. And people interpret global culture in different ways in different places (see above, 162-3). The pace of life has also become faster. This reflects the way commodity circulation has speeded up. One effect of this is that people become increasingly trapped in the present. It's harder to think about the past or future (Rushkoff, 2004).

There has been a general tendency to seek to shift perceived responsibility from "society", the state, or capital onto individuals. For example, poor people are blamed for poverty. They are said to be poor because they have low aspirations, a "culture of dependency", or are incentivised by welfare systems not to be self-reliant strivers (Shildrick and MacDonald, 2013). Approaches to crime have become less rehabilitative and increasingly punitive. This goes hand-in-hand with a shift from social to individual responsibility. Some scholars think people have become increasingly mercenary and self-interested because of neoliberalism (Stewart, 2002). For example, people running public services are more likely to want bribes or personal profits. And people are more likely to cut corners if they'll personally benefit. This may be the source of some of the problems which are misidentified as moral collapse in New Right discourse.

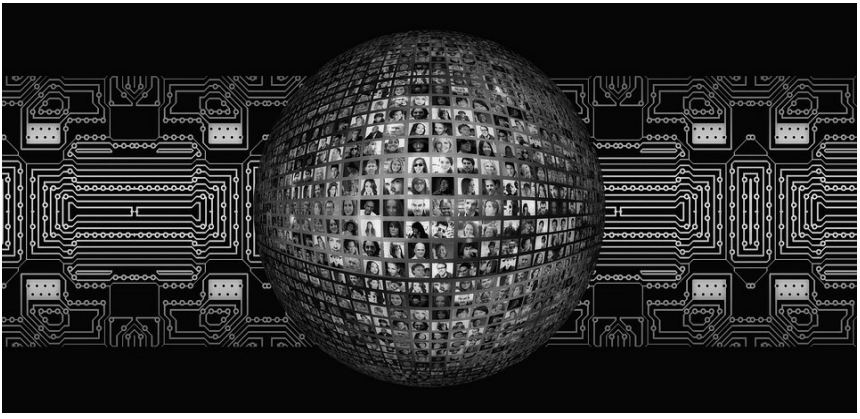
Neoliberal theory predicts that efficient economies will deploy workers more efficiently. They will generate full employment. In practice, however, workers in inefficient sectors haven't been redeployed. They've just been laid-off (Amin, 2003:8). Full employment disappeared in Britain and America in the 1980s, and in Europe in the 2000s. Governments typically manipulate figures to minimise the official unemployment rate. But in fact, large proportions of the population are unemployed. In Britain, the real unemployment rate (including people who aren't claiming unemployment benefit but who would be working in a full employment economy) is around 10% overall, and approaching 20% in deprived, rustbelt areas (Beatty et al., 2012). It's at similar levels in America (Amadeo, 2019). Unemployment tends to be concentrated in areas which used to be centres of industrial production, in smaller towns, and among young people. The situation

is starker in the global South. In a country like Zambia, well over 90% of the population do not have jobs in the formal economy (Pitcher, 2007). In addition to people who are unemployed, others are "underemployed", meaning they can only work part-time even though they want full-time work, or they are doing much lower-paid work than they are capable of. Of people still working, increasing numbers are part-time, temporary, self-employed, and/or work from home. Many are employed in the largely unregulated informal sector.

Consumer goods have become cheaper and more diverse. But prices of basic goods, including housing and land, food and energy, have risen. It is very common for the average wage to be lower than the income needed for a socially expected standard of living, even in rich countries. Large proportions of the population are treated as disposable. In neoliberal ideology, only productive citizens deserve state protection. People who stand in the way of neoliberal accumulation are increasingly seen as valueless and disposable (Banerjee, 2011:339). This situation is most marked in the global South. Groups such as subsistence peasants, street traders, and residents of informal settlements (or shanty-towns), are often subject to dispossession and violence by states. But it's noticeable even in the global North. . The population excluded from neoliberal global capitalism is large and growing. This so-called "relative surplus population" is the main constituency of many of the current period's mass revolts and occupations, such as those of the Arab Spring (Clover, 2016; Karatasli et al., 2015). The poorest sections of the

population often feel they are subjected to neglect and persecution which borders on genocide (Hanafi, 2012:202; Moosa, 2011:177; Boas, 2011). Neoliberalism encompasses social Darwinist dynamics in which the suffering and death of so-called "losers" is tolerated. People are sorted by algorithms into those given and denied support, exposed to or protected from risks, usually based on their usefulness for capital. This is functional for cybernetic control (Terranova, 2004; Berardi, 2016). But its human costs are enormous.

In parts of the global South, there are strong aspirations to "catch up" with the North. Western consumerism is attractive. People see images of glitzy lifestyles in the global media and these images shape their aspirations. Sometimes, people support globalisation as a path to prosperity. In practice, however, such effects rarely emerge. Even when poorer groups benefit, these benefits are outweighed by other changes. For example, there's some evidence that abolishing food price fixing benefits farmers. Farmers in many Southern countries previously had to sell at fixed, low prices to the state marketing board. After liberalisation, they could charge higher prices. However, the benefits of these policies are eaten up by currency devaluation and increased costs (Greenberg, 1997). Small farmers are often pushed aside by big agricultural companies, even if small farmers are more efficient overall. Neoliberalism is often an excuse to '"clean" territories of "inefficient" people" to make way for commodity production (Mondragon, 2006:165). This is causing an 'agrarian crisis in the global South' (McMichael, 2009:292-3).



Neoliberalism seems to coincide with the emergence of cybernetics as an alternative to modern reason. Cybernetics is hard to define. It is both a particular theory and a particular scientific or research field. The term was invented by Norbert Wiener to describe theories of communication and control in a broad sense. It comes from a Greek word for a steersman or pilot – someone who can guide a boat at sea even through complex and unpredictable weather conditions. It has been defined as the scientific study of systems of communication and control. It ranges from studies of computers and artificial intelligence, to studies of animal swarms and ecosystems, to studies of neuroscience. It particularly focuses on information flows, regulation and storage, and changes resulting from feedback loops. Strategy – setting and pursuing goals – is also central to cybernetics. As a model of social control, cybernetics seeks to provide feedback and opportunity structures which produce outcomes desired by the controllers. Cybernetic control systems regulate actors by altering the ways in which they can achieve goals. Attempts to change culture or society are pursued at the level of behaviour change, which in turn is pursued, not through reason or desire, but through incentives, threats, and opportunity-structures.

Cybernetics has both progressive and authoritarian implications. On the one hand, cybernetics seeks to understand how systems can be built without command authority. For example, animals and human groups can use swarm structures to engage in complex activities without hierarchy. On the other hand, the main purpose of cybernetics is regulation and/or control. It is interested in examining and creating self-sustaining, self-regulating systems. This might increase awareness of existing networked systems such as ecosystems and human brains. But it also leads to attempts to create self-regulating, closed forms of capitalism and state control. It is particularly interested in circular, self-reproducing systems. It also relies heavily on models and modelling.

It is usually the manager – whether in a corporation, organisation, or state – who has the role of "steering the ship". To this end, managers are allowed extensive discretionary powers. They are often able to become invisible, because in the feedback loop, there are only actions and consequences – not two or more agents. This position relies on a vast difference in threat-capacity between the powerful and everyone else. It also relies on "pragmatic adjustment". It's only if people don't think they can opt-out that the system's internal control structures can seem like agentless "consequences". Today, the field of cybernetic "management" is extended throughout more and more of social life – for example, "classroom management", "risk management", and "anger management". The system also tends to identify itself with the entire relational field. It doesn't recognise any of the non-representable elements which it is unable to see.

The "death of the subject" is no longer restricted to poststructuralist theory. Cybernetics generally looks at the regulation of the "behaviour" or outward actions of nodes in a system in response to feedback from the environment. It isn't very interested in the traits or inner life of the individual entities. It cares what things *do*, rather than what they *are*. In many ways, it is an updated version of the established theories of behaviourism, functionalism and operationalism. Cybernetics does not engage with people's desires or belief-systems. It deals with people's outer "behaviour", as perceived by the system through profiling. The provision of feedback or "nudges" is taken to be the main way to alter behaviour. It is thus very similar to the neoliberal idea of manipulating opportunity-structures and incentive-structures.

Cybernetics is continuous with modern reason in its focus on social control. The ideal of the cybernetic manager is like the earlier ideals of the Taylorist scientific manager and the warden in the Panopticon who can see everything. But in other ways, cybernetics breaks with modern reason. It's not a "modernist" theory which is influenced in essences and reasoning. Rather, it's a relational theory. But it exists mainly to theorise forms of control. It attempts to maintain control within complex, rapidly shifting networks. It is also highly quantified. It often relies on computer algorithms and profiling, including predictive and ranking systems. In some ways, cybernetics uses computers as a model to understand and organise humans, in the same way that Fordism used mechanical production as a model to understand and organise humans. It imagines and organises humans as if they were computers. Power-holders always seek to act on others from outside, as actors assumed to be malleable through feedback. The person, their existential projects, their worldview, their culture in the Geertzian sense, their unconscious, their individual psychology, either don't exist or don't matter. As Guattari remarks: 'Whether you are happy, whether you stutter, whether you are afraid of death or of old age – all this counts for nothing. That is modern capitalism: desire, madness, gratuitousness - all this counts for nothing! On the contrary, it inconveniences. It makes too much "noise" in the sense of information theory' (1996:137).

Terranova refers to cybernetics in terms of 'soft control' – an alternative to direct command. 'Soft control' is not necessarily any less brutal or more humane than 'hard

control'. However, it is more minimal, more efficient. It applies a minimum amount of force, and operates mainly by modulating the initial conditions, opportunity-structures, or rewards or punishments embedded in social systems. 'The abstract machine of soft control is thus concerned with fine tuning the local conditions that allow machines to outperform the designers' specifications, that surprise the designers but spontaneously improve on them, while also containing their possible space of mutation', allowing a modulation or balance of "solid" ordering forces and "gaseous" chaotic flux so as to produce an order which is both stable and creative (Terranova, 2004:119).

Inbetweenness is important for neoliberal cybernetics. Computational entities arranged in swarms must be kept close to the edge of chaos where 'they can perform computations at the cutting edge. At the same time, these configurations cannot be allowed to pass all the way into randomness, where the turbulence is so strong that no real control can be exercised' (Terranova, 2004:116). This is, as Deleuze and Guattari (1983) long ago suggested of capitalism, a constant process of deterritorialising and reterritorialising. 'What gives the biological turn its mystical tone, is the discovery of this productive line of flight, associated with the unpredictability of this middle zone, a relative autonomy and creativity, that is decoded, freed up from the constraints of sequential programming, almost at the same time as it is recoded, brought back into the fold by selection in the form of fitness functions' (Terranova, 2004:118). This model of computational control is also applied to humans.

The attempt to balance between gaseous chaos and solid rigidity, to achieve a fluid state inbetween, is vital to neoliberal cybernetic theory. Hence, Tim Berners-Lee, one of the founders of the internet, urges humanity to avoid 'two catastrophes: the global uniform McDonald's monoculture and the isolated Heaven's Gate cults that understand only themselves' (2000:203). Chris Langton, an artificial life pioneer, studied swarms of computational "organisms", and found that the optimal point for interesting activity was the point of 'phase transition'. This is a marginal point between different states of the system – for example, melting or boiling points. The 'border zone between highly ordered and highly random' is thus particularly productive (Terranova, 2004:113). Capitalist cybernetics seeks to keep production constantly in the border zone, without its passing over into crisis or state change. In Kelly's (1994) argument, this involves keeping the system forever on the edge of collapse, on the verge of running out of control.

To create this kind of controlled chaos, individuals are reconfigured as minimal reactive units, reacting like selfish genes (Terranova, 2004; Griziotti, 2019). They are both forced to coexist transparently, in close proximity to others, and forced to compete ruthlessly (Terranova, 2004). Each is allowed to do their own thing up to a point, but ruthlessly assessed on their performance and discarded if their innovations are inefficient. Further, no individual is allowed to develop to the point where it loses interoperability or communicability with others (Lazzarato, 1996). From the point of view of human beings, this process of staying at the edge without ever reaching chaos is arguably the worst of both worlds. On the one hand, there is little freedom, as everything is subject to 'soft control'. There is none of the self-actualising creativity of true autonomy. On the other, there is no predictability, certainty, or control. People are thrown around by forces outside their control, and treated as disposable.

The requirement to be communicable (Lazzarato, 1996) is central to this regime. Berardi argues that the cybernetic networked form of power renders power compulsive.

Exclusion, or forced delinking, is the main form of social control. 'You can say "no" in a network – it's irrelevant. If you say "no", you are out of the game. You are not visible anymore. Your action is totally devoid of any effectiveness. And you will be expelled from the social game for a reason that is not a political reason, but a technological reason: you'll be no longer readable, you'll be impossible to understand if you do not behave according to the rules of the network' (Berardi, 2016:203-4). This is probably why internal reinflection of the kind favoured by Bhabha is tolerated in neoliberal scholarship, whereas overtly antagonistic and radically "other" points of view are excluded.

Cybernetics often leads to social systems which ignore people's needs, capabilities, desires, and systems of meaning. These systems either assume people are rational subjects or don't care what kind of subjects they "are". Instead, these systems make unconditional demands ("such-and-such is unacceptable") with threats attached. The system does not negotiate these demands and usually disguises the actor who makes the threat. The threat is presented as if it is a simple consequence of the action it penalises. Usually, people are not reasoned with, their desire is not appealed to, and they are not appealed to through emotions such as compassion. They are subjected to threats and bribes in the hope that this will produce the intended "behaviour". And people's ability to act is restricted. Their opportunity-structure is constantly blocked and changed so as to "nudge" their actions.

The entire structure of cybernetic control relies on the power-holder's ability to gather information. Hence, cybernetic control is accompanied by the gathering of vast quantities

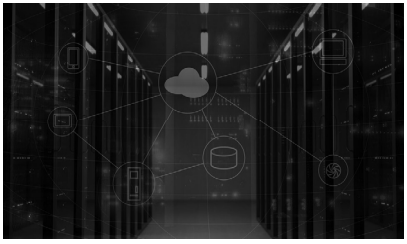
of data. This includes fads for surveillance cameras, biometrics, and online surveillance. The system also encourages responsibilisation. In other words, people are individually held responsible for more and more things which they weren't before (poverty, health, psychological conditions, emotional states, etc). In a cybernetic worldview, people can even be held responsible for the unintended effects of what their words or actions "enable", "facilitate" or indirectly cause. Everyone's actions impact in complex ways on the opportunity-structure, and there is intense pressure not to "facilitate" the wrong things. This effectively precludes free, autonomous spaces – which "facilitate" whatever the people in them happen to want to do. People are also at risk of being profiled as risky themselves – even if they are actually harmless. Someone's profile matters. This leads to intensified appearance management. And people are expected to be "flexible", i.e. to respond to the constantly shifting field of incentives, deterrents and opportunities. This renders social life even more risky and unpredictable.

The psychological impact of this unprecedented regime is extremely negative. Nobody's secure. What's legal and normal one day may be prohibited the next. People are harshly punished for minor transgressions or for appearances generated by algorithms. People become anxious and hypervigilant. They feel both unfree and insecure. Symptoms of trauma become increasingly common. There are constant, high-stakes social contests as to which types of people will be sanctioned and for what. The combination of responsibilisation with the invisibility of the managerial agent who sets the "consequences" leads to a high-stakes struggle as to who gets to occupy the "irresponsible" position of power. This may encourage a "politics of perversion" (see above, 386-91), because the agent enforcing the laws is acting as a tool of an imagined "other", the social system. This is central to the Lacanian definition of perversion. Because of the extensive discretionary power of managers, their quasi-invisibility, and their primary role of creating feedback loops, bullying becomes increasingly common. So does "crybullying", the phenomenon of adopting a victim stance so as to bully others.

As a general way of seeing, cybernetics is applicable to almost anything. Many of its claims have infiltrated everyday thought and practice to the point where they are almost unquestioned. It has largely replaced “modern reason” and positivism as the main basis for social power. A new set of approaches to policy areas have emerged which incorporate cybernetic assumptions. Examples include Situational Crime Prevention, hotspot policing (e.g. COMPSTAT), competency-based education and training, risk-profiling, and cognitive behavioural psychology. Sometimes, computers take over from humans in implementing these profiling systems. In some parts of America, algorithms now predict crime probabilities and assign police patrols as a result. Around half of stock market transactions are done by algorithms.

In a critique of cybernetics, the Invisible Committee argue that governing now mostly involves ensuring that everyone's connected and that their communications are visible. This is achieved through state cooperation with companies like Facebook and Google. Algorithms are used to predict “behaviour”. This means the government doesn't need either trust or consent. The system isn't interested in individuals. It's just interested in their possible “lines of flight”, the social actions which lead to resistance and system collapse. It's therefore interested in people's “profiles”, the data held about them and how they act. These authors believe cybernetics is slowly replacing political economy as the main method of government. Crucially, this means that “modern reason” is no longer dominant. Officially, people keep believing in dualisms, human agency, and so on. Ordinary people are encouraged to keep believing they are individuals. But the system

actually practices a very different philosophy. People at the top see people as "selfless" beings without an inner self. Rather, people are constituted by their relations (as in Bhabha's co-constitutivity). People are hubs or nodes in complex information systems. They constantly self-monitor and optimise performance in response to feedback. This view is more similar to Buddhism than it is to modern thought.



In the Quantified Self Movement, people even come to see *themselves* in terms of observable data! This puts a rather different spin on the idea that a message returned from outside has unexpected, radical consequences. In "smart cities", people become generators of data and ideas in a transparent network. These cities are resilient to disasters because of their cybernetic control systems. In the Internet of Things, everything becomes fully linked into a global information and control system. The main purpose of cybernetic control is to impede the entropy, or collapse through chaos and energy-loss, of capitalism. Its aim is to create a self-regulating capitalism. And it increasingly creates a type of human being which is compatible with it. If people play along, they are totally controlled and manipulated. They might even lose the ability to experience simple pleasures in the subjective, sensory world. The Invisible Committee believe that cybernetics lacks subjective appeal. It can't provide meaning or joy. This is what will ultimately defeat it.

Similarly, Baudrillard (1993, 1994) argues that capitalism is no longer a productive system. It's focused on its own reproduction to the exclusion of everything else. It is a system of simulation. This means that it doesn't alienate something which existed prior to it. It generates copies which are derived from models or blueprints. It tries to pre-program

reality. It reduces life to a set of concepts or images. And life is increasingly rearranged by being generated from prior images, rather than images representing reality. The system is primarily the circulation of signifiers. It is tautological. It has no justification. It simply exists. In the past, the system claimed to exist for a purpose. Now, it just tries to program everything. There isn't a particular site of power any more. Power simply circulates across the surface of the social field.

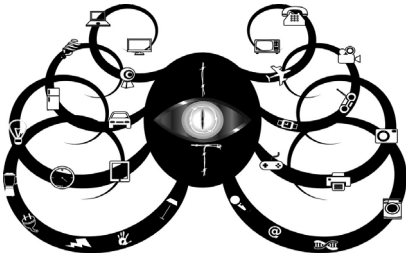
Cybernetic power is reproduced through "the code" (see Robinson, 2012). This is an organised system of meanings arranged in relation to one another. The code is binarising or "disjunctive". It constantly divides people and things into categories. People are constantly "tested" to fit them into the code. The code is simply operational. It doesn't have particular investments in any of its own categories. People are alienated by identifying themselves with their image or profile. But it's not really *them* in the profile, it's an aggregate of "behaviours" or signifiers. Everything in the "code" actually carries a single meaning: the system's own reproduction. The system survives by constantly absorbing everything new into the code. The code is mapped onto reality at such a close level that they're tightly entangled. Anything captured by the code tends to lose referential value – it stops referring to anything outside itself. It just refers to itself over and over. The feedback the system gets, framed in terms of alternatives within the code, simply gives back the system's own message over and over.

The weak point of this assemblage is that it lacks subjective meaning. It loses an aspect of life which Baudrillard terms "symbolic exchange". This is the aspect of life which provides subjective meaning and motivates passion. The code is purely operational. It doesn't provide meaning. Everything that's sucked into the code loses its expressive meaning. Hence, depth phenomena and expressive meaning tend to disappear. Or they become separate from the system and its endless reproduction. The system struggles to get any hold on anything outside itself. It gradually implodes in its own unintended effects.

Foucauldian theories have similarly analysed neoliberalism as a system of 'governmentality' – a mindset used to control. In particular, neoliberalism uses outer constraint and manipulation of incentives, deterrents and opportunities for purposes of social control. The government manipulates the opportunity structure to get people, assumed to be rational subjects, to do what it wants (Lemke, 2001; Hallsworth, 2002). It relies less on explicit coercion than on media-led practices of 'self-normalisation' (Bordo, 1993:201). Discourses of self-esteem (Cruikshank, 1996) have been understood in this way. According to Foucault, neoliberals deny any distinction between capitalism and society. They think all of society can be understood in a capitalist way. This means they don't have to pay much attention to individual motivations. As a result, states become less interested in governing individuals than in governing populations on an aggregate, statistical level. Also, media and market systems are used to manipulate desires and lifestyles. In principle, neoliberalism encourages endless freedom and diversity. In practice, it only allows a very narrow range of subjectivities. Governmentality doesn't suppress individuality. It cultivates a particular kind of subjectivity. It encourages people to see themselves as autonomous. But it also tries to govern them *through* this very autonomy. It manipulates the opportunity-structure so that autonomous individuals act in particular ways. The advantage of this strategy is that the state can control people without making itself responsible for them. Similar theories have been advanced by Deleuze and Virilio. Deleuze (1990) calls the system a 'society of control'. Virilio (2000) sees it as 'endocolonialism' - the re-importation of colonial methods to the interior of former imperial countries.

According to Anglo-Foucauldians, neoliberalism is not about the state leaving the economy alone. Rather, neoliberalism uses the state in a particular way, on behalf of the economy. The state is not meant to undertake economic functions or intervene in the effects of markets. Instead, it is meant to create conditions to facilitate economic competition and growth. It is also meant to rearrange social life in line with, and on the model of, the market, to 'regulate society by the market' (Brown, 2015:62). It tries to mould particular subjectivities, to turn people into the rationalistic monads of neoclassical economics. Hence, neoliberalism is 'also the management of populations to cultivate individualistic, competitive, acquisitive and entrepreneurial behaviour' (Carter, 2016:33).

Brown argues that neoliberalism is novel in the history of western politics: 'the vanquishing of *homo politicus* by contemporary neoliberal rationality, the insistence that there are only rational market actors in every sphere of human existence, is novel, indeed revolutionary, in the history of the West' (2015:99). Neoliberalism only recognises a single social "game". Success at this "game" is the only recognised type of success, and 'those who act according to other principles are not simply [taken as] irrational, but [supposedly] refuse 'reality'' (Wark, 2017:67). Neoliberal reality is 'wild and unpredictable'. Today, neoliberals widely acknowledge a role for the state in propping up the economy. The state is meant to be responsible for economic performance, without being able to predict or control it. This leads, in Wark's words, to a 'centrist extremism. You can be for gay marriage or for prayer in schools, but the market is not to be questioned. The market is not there to enable the good life; all of life is to be sacrificed to keeping the market going' (2017:134). People are thus subordinated to impersonal market systems. 'This is the central paradox, perhaps even the central ruse, of neoliberal governance: the neoliberal revolution takes place in the name of freedom—free markets, free countries, free men—but tears up freedom's grounding in sovereignty for states and subjects alike' (Brown, 2015:108).

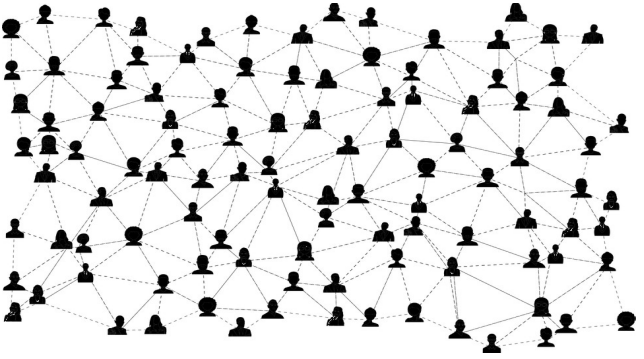


Cybernetic governmentality is also sustained by external ranking and profiling systems such as credit ratings, no-fly lists, social media popularity, and performance metrics. The main goal of government policy is outer constraint through opportunity-structures. This is different from the Fordist or "disciplinary" attempt to create particular kinds of subjects. The 'social credit' system emerging in China, where a range of opportunities and incentives are tied one's social performance across different fields and that of one's associates, is an extreme development of this pattern. These systems largely replace the older practices of "sovereignty" (spectacular control by a master) and "discipline" (control through making bodies docile). The end-point, if the process continues, is downright dystopian.

Contemporary people may have a relationship to language which renders Bhabha's approach ineffective, because co-constitution is no longer present in language. The poststructuralist language model is based on a social system in which children learn language from their parents. Language is thus connected to self-other binaries, Oedipal dynamics (lack, identity, symbolic castration, etc), affect, and the Imaginary (the sphere of images, affects and attachments which forms prior to language). Today, however, children interact as much, if not more, with computers and televisions as with their parents. Much of their early language learning involves learning from machines. As early as 1975, Rose Goldsen observed: 'We are breeding a generation of human beings whose primal impressions come from a machine – it's the first time in history this has occurred' (Goldsen, 1975, cited Berardi, 2015:47). This arguably renders the language model obsolete.

In Oedipal/Fordist language-learning, access to language is mediated by affective relations between the child's body and the mother's body. When language is learnt from machines, it becomes detached from bodily affects/emotions. This might mean that language is becoming more operational. Words are no longer used as ways to affectively grasp meaning or to articulate meaning rooted in the depth of the body. Communication is no longer used as an affective relation between bodies. Instead, language detached from emotions is used to transmit operating instructions, commands, and cybernetic feedback (Muraro, 2018; Harvey, 2016; Turkle, 2011).

This mechanism is closely related to contemporary capitalism. 'Language is captured by the networked machine and turned into an essentially productive activity. Herein lies the trap; people are encouraged to consider their linguistic competence as [a factor] of economic competition, and to manage and invest in them as such' (Berardi, 2015:166). This fits well into a stage of capitalism which 'sets information "free" from bodies' (Wark, 2017:190; c.f. Bey, 1996). The effect of this may well be intense psychological suffering, as people struggle to find meaning in language or to express their emotions linguistically. Currently fashionable therapeutic responses (such as learning so-called "emotional intelligence", or an observational ability to identify and name emotions) do little to paper over the resultant inadequacy of language.



So what does this tell us about Bhabha? Bhabha focuses on the structure of global inequality which operated during Fordism, and even earlier, in the nineteenth century. In this structure, the wealth of some parts of the world was underpinned by the exploitation of others. Integrated national economies with social safety nets provided a sense of security and secure meanings in the rich and middling countries. Bhabha identifies to some degree with the social movements which helped to destabilise and partially overthrow Fordism in the 1960s-70s. His theory is developed from the successes of decolonisation in disrupting Fordism.

However, Bhabha was writing in a period where neoliberalism was being created to succeed Fordism. Although he did not belong to the New Right, Bhabha was largely enthusiastic about this. He thought that neoliberalism leads to diversity and multiculturalism, not authoritarian control. Global production chains undermine stable identities. Migrants are subversive, not hyperexploited. Precarity is something to be celebrated. The hated "subject" of modernity is finally being broken down. This process of disruption is meant to threaten social power, because Bhabha assumes that power operates in the same way as in Fordism. But the nature of capitalism has shifted. Bhabha is mostly silent on the resubordination of the global South. He presumably attributes this resubordination to the persistence of western reason. He blames the persistence of strong western egos. Yet resubordination occurs through new mechanisms of rapidly circulating capital, debt dependency, and cybernetic control. These have no place in Bhabha's theory.

This oversight regarding new structures of oppression undermines Bhabha's political perceptiveness in the present (or 1980s) context. Bhabha did not foresee how the changing functions of the state would undercut the pursuit of socialism (however moderate). He did not notice the emerging forms of cybernetic control and their differences from old modernist binaries. He did not see the connections between

neoliberal "disjuncture" and the emergence of new hatreds. He ignored processes of homogenisation. His emphasis on mimicry is easily recuperated through the code, by means of the post-Washington Consensus and the Third Way. He doesn't see how the *che vuoi* of exploitation is replaced by the disposability of the excluded. He either ignores the excluded stratum or treats their experience as a desirable type of disjuncture. He reproduces the sapping of subjective meaning and affirmative affect which characterises neoliberal cybernetics. He is largely complicit in the pragmatic adaptation theorised by Fisher (2009), the reduction of reality to neoliberalism. He partakes of the politics of impossibility (Brown, 1999). And he does not have a strategy to disrupt the new power of transnational capital, or "Empire". As we shall see (below, 961-4), securitisation also hit him sideways, despite being implicit in his discussions of anti-colonial revolt. And his model of political strategy is somewhat cybernetic. It seeks to provide nudges which shift dominant groups' "behaviour" based on feedback mechanisms based on co-constitutivity. In an era where the system relies on binary oppositions, hybridity may well be subversive. In an era where the system poses as being all that exists, and where both poles of socially recognised binaries point to the system, an antagonistic splitting may be more subversive. There cannot be hybridity when there is only one pole of the "binary".

CHAPTER 11

Homi Bhabha's Politics

Introduction: What is politics?

Is Homi Bhabha a political theorist? This is a matter of some controversy. Marxist critics tend to portray Bhabha as insufficiently political. This objection annoys his supporters. For example, Rose argues that the signs of political struggle are apparent in his work. It is not 'unconnected' to political struggle (1995:368). Depending who you believe, Bhabha is either an apolitical writer, or a thoroughly political writer. For those who see him as a political writer, he is read variously as a radical black liberationist, a liberal reformer, a crypto-Marxist, a supporter of neoliberal capitalism, a quietist opponent of political action, or an elitist supporter of top-down culture. How are we to decipher this diverse reception? In part, as usual, Bhabha's lack of clarity contributes to misunderstandings and hybrid (not always productive) readings. In part, one is dealing with the usual polemical excesses of opponents quick to pigeonhole someone either as a communist (if they oppose the status quo) or a liberal (if they do not oppose it enough). But there is also a question of what politics *is*, which partly explains the controversy.

The question of the role, function and scope of politics is central to understanding the political implications of Bhabha's work. In critical theory, politics can have many meanings. The "common sense" meaning of the word "politics" associates it mainly with party politics and elections – also known as *institutional politics*. A political approach would be expected to provide a rationale for political institutions, for voting for a particular party, or for a particular electoral strategy or platform. The Third Way, neoconservatism, political liberalism and social democracy are examples of this kind of politics. Radical

theories typically maintain that most of everyday life is "political". For example, bosses exercise political power over workers, and police impose a particular political order in the streets. They might also comment on electoral politics, but their focus is on understanding, resisting, overthrowing, dropping out of, transforming, subverting, or (more rarely) defending particular power-relations in everyday life i.e. *movement politics*. They are particularly interested in social and political movements – protests, strikes, riots, sit-ins, blockades, insurgencies, revolutions. They often disagree as to which struggles are important, which are progressive or otherwise valuable, and which tactics are effective or justified. Socialism, anarchism, radical ecology, and feminism have traditionally worked at the level of movement politics. There are also right-wing varieties of movement politics – for instance, salafi Muslim movements, neo-Nazis and conservative Christians. Some commentators see movement politics as a distraction from electoral politics. Others see it as a more radical challenge to the dominant political order. Some radicals insist on movement politics *instead of* institutional politics, because taking part in institutional politics means selling-out, accepting the rules of the game determined by the elite or the ruling-class. Others combine the two approaches.

In addition to movement politics, some radicals are also interested in changing everyday life directly – by living differently from the norm. The exact changes they make differ with the political perspective adopted, but they might include things like squatting, trying to live without money, refusing to get a job, living collectively, practising polyamory, being vegan

or vegetarian, reducing consumption, working in a co-op, buying fairtrade goods, distributing work in a gender-equal way, not using particular words or gestures, defying dominant norms or laws, or only using Open Source/Free Software. More informally, movements often have their own jargon, style of dress, and style of music or other culture. For example, anarcho-punks might wear baggy clothes with political patches, have unusual hairstyles such as Mohicans, and have tattoos and/or body piercings. They might listen to hardcore punk music, and use forthright language including swear-words. Right-wing movements also have everyday practices, often religious or militaristic. For example, it might be important to maintain monogamy or celibacy, or to be able to use a gun.

There is controversy over whether this kind of *lifestyle politics* is really political. "Lifestyle activists" are criticised by some adherents of movement politics for allegedly cutting themselves off from the wider community, for valuing style over substance, and for making ineffectual changes in their own lives, rather than trying to influence wider social structures. "Lifestyle activism" is criticised as overlapping with neoliberal trends such as self-branding. There is often also a big overlap between stylistic elements of political movements and wider cultural trends which are not so obviously political. For adherents, lifestyle changes are often important for existential reasons, or as logical consequences of particular political views. Also, small "lifestyle" changes can add up to big social changes. Many things which used to be fringe subcultural practices are now mainstream – for example, recycling, having a series of different sexual partners, and using the Internet. On a still wider level, everyday life and everyday beliefs are sometimes said to be political. They involve power-relations among social actors, negotiations of power, implicit norms and values, controversial political beliefs which have become habitual and invisible, and a series of traces of institutional, movement, and lifestyle politics. A scholar might thus analyse the *mundane politics* of a practice like shopping or dating, even when there's no explicit political intent involved.

In universities, the study of politics often encompasses political theory, international relations (mainly relations among nation-states), and the study of political institutions. Social movements are sometimes studied as part of politics, but are just as often studied in sociology, geography, anthropology, and a range of other disciplines. "Lifestyles" are more likely to be studied in sociology or cultural studies, and in some countries, there are also courses dealing specifically with race, gender or sexuality. These often examine the social movements, lifestyle movements, and everyday life of particular groups, or the differences between dominant and oppressed groups – covering all four kinds of politics. Mainstream *political theory* consists of a range of perspectives which defend a particular way of organising the state and social life. It usually seeks to justify existing institutions, conditionally or unconditionally. Most mainstream political theorists are liberals, or are influenced by liberalism. The main opposing position to liberalism in mainstream political theory is communitarianism. Radical political theory comes closer to movement-style politics. It is often highly critical of established institutions, and proposes radical change. Political institutions can be studied by a range of approaches, such as comparative politics and political science. These approaches tend to be quite technical and use institutional modelling and quantitative methods. They focus on institutional politics.

So what kind of political scholar is Bhabha? As we have seen (above, 151), Bhabha insists that all of life is political. He adopts the widest of the available definitions. All of life, including its apparently non-political aspects, is political. Institutional, movement, lifestyle, and mundane politics are all legitimately political. As a result, everything Bhabha writes is in a sense political in his own terms. The work discussed in previous chapters on interpreting art and literature, mimicking colonisers' culture, affect, the construction of identity and so on, is political in this sense. This also means that institutional, movement and lifestyle politics are all (perhaps, equally legitimate) ways to engage in this strategic field.

For someone adopting a narrower definition of politics, however, much of Bhabha's work will seem cultural rather than political. It is not focused on institutions, or on social movements, or even on lifestyle changes. Bhabha does not do political theory or political science which is recognisable to academic practitioners of the mainstream forms of these disciplines. He does not offer a systematic political programme. He only mentions parties very rarely. He also rarely talks about social movements. This is why Marxists – who focus mainly on movement and institutional politics – find Bhabha's work worryingly apolitical. Yet Bhabha *does* occasionally discuss issues which Marxists would recognise as political – for example, the Indian 'Mutiny', human rights, the 9/11 attacks, the 'right to development', the 'right to narrate', and the construction of communities of marginalised people. However, he does not have an overall political platform. Like Derrida, Bhabha dislikes general rules and procedures. He believes people should make ungrounded free decisions in each moment. Therefore, he is hostile to general political programmes, and hesitant about providing general political theories. Most of his political discussions are responses to particular events or controversies.

It seems to me rather fruitless to argue about whether Bhabha's type of politics can properly be called "politics" at all. I'm happy to cautiously accept the vastly expanded definition of politics if it aids understanding. But this still leaves unanswered the question of whether Bhabha's politics is radical or progressive. This and the subsequent chapters focus on the places where Bhabha discusses politics in the more specific senses. These are few and far between, but by no means nonexistent. These chapters thus situates Bhabha's cultural politics, his politics in the broadest of the four senses, in a more specific project in terms of the first three senses.

I'm unsurprised that the sparsity of reference to direct forms of politics – such as parties, protests, elections, strikes, underground movements, 'riots', direct action, and so on – is concerning to critics. It reinforces wider impressions that Bhabha exaggerates the political importance of 'high' culture and theory, and that his politics is basically liberal or quietistic (see below, 890-907). However, I believe it's unfair to suggest that Bhabha is apolitical, but at the same time, I think the politics involved are problematic. I agree that there is politics in Bhabha's work, but I'd argue that the struggles he values are mainly those of included actors from historically marginalised backgrounds. When he interprets political struggles of the excluded and marginalised, he reduces them to terms palatable to the included. For example, he is more interested in the cosmopolitan redefinition of citizenship than in concrete struggles to destroy or cross national borders (contrast King, 2016; Papastergiadis, 2000; Mezzadra, 2011). Ultimately his politics rests on maintaining the capitalist/colonial system. It is to be suspended and ironised so as to empower subaltern actors, but no alternative is offered. Indeed, Bhabha is interested in incorporating more people into global capitalism through migration, literacy and precarity. This reading of Bhabha will be laid out and justified in the following chapters.

Bhabha's theory does not lend itself to recognisable forms of political agency – whether those of parties, social movements or countercultural lifestyles. Because of co-constitutivity (see above, 119-20), agency is always a problem in Bhabha's work. As we have seen, people aren't even subjects or "agents" in any obvious sense at an individual level. Identities are always split and haunted by their "other". This means that there is no subject of history, like the working-class in Marxist theory. Class is not primary over other identities. But, other identities can't be elevated to primacy either. The nation-state is not the main site of political action. Minority micro-societies resist submersion in the nation-state (WS, 22). Power emerges from local conditions, not global rationalities of particular groups (WS, 22). For Bhabha, reviving nationalism is an inadequate response to global capitalism. Global capitalism does not respect national borders (WS, 22). Rather than the Marxist idea of contradiction driving progress, Bhabha's view involves articulating opposition at an 'oblique or adjacent angle' (DDR, 32).

Indeed, for Bhabha, there is no specific standpoint, radical in itself, from which opposition can begin. It's not just that the "liberal individual" or the "working class" is not the agent of progressive politics. Bhabha also denies any such place to colonised peoples, sub-national minorities, migrants and so on – even though he gives them a privileged place in his theory. The conclusion that there is no subject of history follows logically from Bhabha's view that subversive practice entails ambiguity and mixture of oppositional categories. For Bhabha, the lack of a standpoint of radical opposition does not cause political stasis, or sap people's will to act. Rather, it provides the basis for negotiating a different kind of politics without an overarching subject, which instead articulates different positions (LC, 27). Bhabha is particularly interested in the presence of social agency at sites where it is denied, and where revolutionary change has not happened (SPD, 385). He is interested in unintended as well as intended agency (SPD, 386). And he complains that people have misread this position as a loss of agency (SPD, 390).

We shall see (below, Chapter 15) how this idea plays out in relation to movement- and community-building. For now, it is important to note that politics (whether institutional, movement, lifestyle, or cultural) is subordinate to philosophy in Bhabha's approach – in practice, if not in theory. Bhabha's most important beliefs, the 'trunk' of his theory from which the rest extends as roots and branches, is his structural model of subject-formation through co-constitution of self and other. The twin assumptions of co-constitution and successful interpellation (see Chapter 2) are central here. With this general model framing Bhabha's account of the whole of social life, politics is itself reduced to the operation of Lacanian/Derridean structural categories. Political action is complex. It is not a manifestation of an individual or collective will. Rather, it occurs through displacement. It occurs between a self and an other which are co-constituted, and it "works" by displacing the boundary between the two. For example, political violence against oppressors usually hurts the oppressed, because the two identities are entangled. Political resistance is always a kind of double violence against self and other (Byrne, 2009:145-6).

Bhabha's approach to political concepts is consistently Derridean. Political concepts are treated as unrealisable ideals, but the process of pursuing them is valued anyway. The source of this approach is probably Derrida's *Force of Law* (Derrida, 1992), which treats 'justice' as an unachievable ideal which at once grounds, haunts, and subverts 'law' as a flawed social practice. Bhabha does the same thing that Derrida does to 'justice' with other political concepts. For example, according to Bhabha, democracy is a 'utopian' narrative which necessarily fails. It must recognise failure as part of its narrative. Its strength lies not in perfectibility but persistence (DDR, 28-9). Democracy is never fully achieved. Instead, one constantly struggles to revise and reshape one's ideals. Bhabha thus sublimates failure as providing moral coherence and consolation (DDR, 29). Democracy is 'de-realised' or unrealisable, not simply unrealised or incomplete (DDR, 29). To achieve this de-realised position, minority and marginalised experience needs to be moved to the core of political discourse (DDR, 31).

In the Margins: Jacques Derrida's Force of Law

Jacques Derrida is considered one of the founders of poststructuralism. He pioneered a number of concepts, and a style of writing, which Bhabha imitates. As shown above (88-96), the theory of the co-constitution of self and other is in part a Derridean invention. In the 1989 text *Force of Law* (Derrida, 1992), Derrida provides the structural matrix for much of Bhabha's politics. *Force of Law* is a text which justifies "imperfect" forms of law and democracy through the aporias taken to haunt them, and to be constitutive of them. It is a novel attempt to legitimise the modern state, while also acknowledging its limits. In *Force of Law*, the French word Derrida uses is '*droit*' – which can mean 'law', 'rightness' or 'rights'. He is thus talking

about 'law' and 'justice', but also about 'rights' and 'responsibility' as the basis of ethics.

Derrida's view is a complex response to dominant theories of law. Positive law theorists believe that law is simply whatever happens to be imposed by the sovereign. Something is the law if the king, parliament, or courts decide or accept it is the law. This means there's no way to determine that the decision has a legal basis. The sovereign imposition of law cannot itself be legal or just. But in that case, it is hard to distinguish from any other kind of violent rule – such as the control of a neighbourhood by a criminal gang, or a civil war where several factions demand obedience to different laws. These theorists usually think law is legitimate, but they can't really explain why. (Some of them try to argue that the law is legitimate because it provides benefits overall – but there are a lot of cases where state power provides no benefits to particular people, where stateless societies do well enough without formal law, and where a law which is sometimes broken causes greater benefits than one which is strictly kept. Gangs and opposition groups might also provide benefits). Natural law theorists believe that law worthy of the name requires a particular content. This content is derived from natural rights. People might be born with these rights and unable to get rid of them – or they might create them through a social contract. The problem in this case, for poststructuralists, is that there is no basis for natural law or natural rights. Human nature is contingent and constructed through language. Furthermore, a lot of existing laws are not "real" laws according to a sufficiently precise natural law approach. States in practice violate a lot of the rights they claim to respect and defend. Radicals often portray natural law theory either as naïve essentialism or a way of mystifying legal power.

Derrida has a clever solution. On the one hand, he believes, like positive law theorists, that law is grounded in sovereignty. The law is binding because it

is made by a sovereign power who exercises their sovereign authority. The sovereign inserts law into society. The sovereign's power cannot itself be just or unjust. But it doesn't exclusively depend on the ability to make demands backed by threats and coercion. Law has a "mystical foundation". It has authority, but its authority is itself groundless. It is ultimately founded on violence. It is “mystical” because it is a point of silence. For Derrida, it is never possible to justify the performance of language, the specific speech-act, by metalinguistic rules. When asked to justify the rules, one always meets a silence of this kind. No action or speech-act can rest on anything but itself. Its violence is always ungrounded. Since law has no foundation, there is no objective legal authority, and everyone is free to formulate their own ethics. This part of the argument is similar to existentialism, Nietzsche, Stirner, Hakim Bey and the Situationists. In these cases, it leads to antinomianism – the view that no laws have legitimate authority. For Derrida, however, the situation if everyone follows their desires is an undesirable kind of anarchy. It leads to the unlimited circulation of signs and meanings, and leads to the collapse of social welfare. People need to be able to control their desires.

To distinguish the 'force of law', or legal coercion, from unjustified violence requires reference to justice. Derrida's concept of justice is undefined and shifting in its usage. But in general, it is his solution to the problem of conflicting desires. His solution is that each person can give themselves their own law through self-restraint. (This is similar to Kant's argument). Self-restraint stems from responsibility, and responsibility stems from the feeling of being 'before the other' – of having responsibility towards another being which is absolutely other to oneself. Justice is a demand to act which stems from the call of the other, as absolutely other. To do justice to the other, one must recognise – at the level of feelings – the other's singularity or absolute

difference from the self, and accept the other in spite (or because) of this. One must recognise the other as absolutely other, as disruptive of and even threatening to the self, and as a disturbance in the world. (The other in this sense is actually constitutive of the self according to Derrida; see above, 357-64). One should maintain awareness of the other as disturbance,

without trying to change her or him. Justice is not harmony, but the ability to bear disharmony. By bearing disharmony, one opens the possibility for the other to exist (1994:27-8). One represses or foregoes the desire to change or control the other. One recognises one's own power as an existential decision-maker, but gives up some of this power to allow the other to have some power too. This idea of 'responsibility' or 'hospitality' is the root of the idea that discomfort is a morally valuable emotion. The reason to accept discomfort is not simply compassion. It is also important because discursive violence makes society deterministic and inflexible – and thus destroys existential freedom.

Derridean justice is as much sensual and subjective as intellectual (Arav, 2010). It is a 'horizon'. This term has a technical meaning in phenomenology. A horizon is an unreachable end-point which one infinitely pursues or waits for – like the completion of the labours of Sisyphus. However, justice also involves a felt requirement for an immediate decision. This decision is made without sufficient knowledge, because of its urgency. Yet justice always remains absent – in Derrida's terms, 'to-come' (see above, 304-8). It is always something people aim towards, but which they never actually reach. It aims towards the impossible. Because it is beyond law and language, justice cannot itself be deconstructed. Since violence means changing or controlling the other, justice is radically non-violent. Because law is founded on violence, law makes justice impossible.

This aspect of Derrida's critique is taken further by Christian anarchists such as Leo Tolstoy (1990/1879-1908). For Tolstoy, government and law are based on violence, and therefore unjust. This means they should be abolished by means of non-violent refusal. Walter Benjamin (1940), who Derrida both draws on and criticises in Force of Law, also rejects the groundless sovereignty of law. He calls for a 'law-destroying violence' which makes sovereignty ineffective and brings a messianic moment of immediacy into history. Historical agency escapes from the determinism of the legal order. Alfredo Bonanno's (1977, 1993) insurrectionist anarchism also owes a lot to existentialist views of freedom and responsibility.

For Derrida, however, law remains legitimate, but dependent on justice. Law has to claim to be grounded in justice in order to obtain its mystical foundation. But there is an unstable distinction between law and justice. Laws can be unjust. To be just, a legal ruling does not just need to be 'right', to follow the law. Every case is different, unique. Even if a judge or a bureaucrat thinks they're just following rules, in fact they always have to do the work of inserting a different unique case into the legal categories. This is a type of violence in which they remain free and responsible. Justice requires an ethical relation to the Other as someone different, and not a mechanical application of rules. But this also means that every decision is 'undecidable'. There is no well-grounded way to make the decision. It risks injustice either way. It is a moment of 'madness', of acting without knowledge and without rules. The law (or right) is both conserved and suspended/destroyed in the just decision. The decision is itself an act of violence which repeats the foundation of law. But this violence means that law can't achieve justice. Indeed, it makes justice impossible.

This is a special case of Derrida's wider theory. This same undecidability, or ambiguity, is present in all language and action. Making a legal decision is simply a special case of the wider ambiguity of linguistic interpretation. This leads to swingeing ethical demands. Each is absolutely responsible for the consequences of all their choices and actions. The point is to recognise the undecidability of the case before deciding. It is important to experience it as 'impossible' to make a decision – by recognising the lack of foundation of the decision. One then feels an obligation to make a decision anyway. This feeling of obligation is the call of the Other. It is the sublime moment when people come into contact with a radical otherness which is completely inaccessible. After passing through this moment, someone can make a 'free' (or 'responsible') decision. Yet it is never possible to say, in the present, that a decision is just. It seems that one is caught in a kind of permanent guilt, since one has to decide, the decision is groundless (one cannot know its consequences), and yet one is responsible for its consequences. Deconstruction – Derrida's philosophical approach – is always caught in-between law and justice. In *Force of Law*, Derrida redefines deconstruction in more political terms than he used before. It is not just about finding paradoxes and aporias, about showing self-other co-constitution. It is also about the demand for justice. Deconstruction takes place in the space inbetween law – which can be deconstructed – and justice – which cannot.

This doctrine is at most reformist, and quite possibly changes nothing. The decision-maker experiences a kind of sublime existential awareness through making a decision in spite of the lack of a guarantee. This might reduce the dangers of a certain kind of uncritical following of orders and rules, associated for instance with Hannah Arendt's (1963) depiction of the Nazi bureaucrat Adolf Eichmann. It might make judges and bureaucrats more flexible in handling individual cases. But the sublime experience does not

experience does not necessarily change the decision they will make. It does not lead to a just decision, or render the judge accountable to anyone else. It does not take away the power of some to decide, or the vulnerability of others to their decisions. This seems to leave judges doing exactly what they already did, but a bit less arrogantly, with a recognition that they're doing some kind of injustice or violence. They persecute and punish as an ungrounded, tragic, undecidable necessity – but they continue to persecute and punish. Worse, Derrida's theory seems to authorise violent misreadings and abuses of rules and procedures. It allows a judge or other decision-maker to justify their violence to themselves and others, and to enforce their personal morality behind the veil of the call of the other. And it seems to duplicate tendencies to extend individual responsibility well beyond the range of individual control, which have become widespread and socially destructive in neoliberalism. It installs a kind of generalised superego which is potentially very destructive, both individually and socially. Both the intolerance it can give rise to, and the license for interpretive violence it provides, have been documented above in related to Bhabha's work.

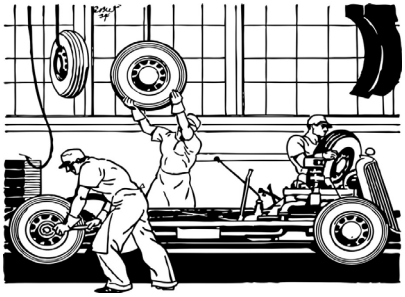
Like many pro-systemic advocates of existing institutions, Derrida conveniently arrives at conclusions which concur with the status quo. But the logic of the theory does not necessarily produce these conclusions. If there is no objective moral authority, but only ungrounded individual decisions, how can one justify the institution of law at all? Doesn't it make more sense to encourage some kind of anarchism, albeit perhaps a moralised type? For example, a Derridean approach might point towards restorative or transformative rather than retributive justice, or to diffuse systems of customary reciprocity and balancing. Punishment is always a case of trying to control or change the other, to render them unthreatening. It is exemplary of the kind of violence Derrida opposes – and it is not by any means a universal, necessary practice.

It seems misguided, therefore, to seek to defend statist legal systems in Derridean terms. And if the point is to recognise the other and not try to change them, doesn't this also apply to relations to supposed oppressors? Derrida's ethic, like those of Buddhism and nonviolent communication (c.f. Heckert, 2012), seems to apply to everyone – not just to privileged groups. Yet isn't the unbearable, disquieting, threatening other for a

postcolonial theorist, actually a coloniser, or a Nazi, or perhaps someone who appropriates their culture or who casually uses racial slurs? If so, does this mean that a Derridean politics is impossible, or simply that Derrida's followers are breaking their own rules when they apply "intolerance of intolerance"? Or does their structural holism cause them to reject the aspects of Derrida's conclusions which rely on a deciding subject?

Parallels can also be drawn between the Derridean ideas of 'justice' and 'the other' and the Freudian superego. For Freud, the superego is a part of the ego which separates from it and turns the ego's outward, aggressive drives inward against the ego itself. This image of a selfhood 'split' by repressive forms of desire is taken by critics such as Reich, Vaneigem and Deleuze and Guattari to be specifically capitalist and statist. It is a means to form 'cops in the head' so as to render people docile and productive for capital – and it is unnecessary if social activities and relations are fulfilling and enjoyable in themselves.

Can people actually orient to an ideal they simultaneously recognise as unachievable? There are historical precursors, particularly in theology. Some mystics seek to endlessly pursue a truth they know they cannot reach. But in general, the effect of such a position seems both unviable and conservative in its effects. For those living with sharp experiences of oppression, the sublimation of suffering into recognition of an absent ideal is too insubstantial. And if it works, its effect is to blunt the intolerability of the present through its inevitability. Bhabha's approach tends to encourage moral and cultural responses to social problems. Instead of concrete responses, Derridean ethical awareness becomes a panacea. For example, as we have seen, it provides the model for overcoming the antinomies of risk society through 'disorganised responsibility' (LS, 132). If only people didn't expect certainty, risk would be tolerable! Bhabha's politics of negativity is also expressed in his view of architecture. This is clearly modelled on Derrida's *Force of Law*. On the one hand, 'we have no option but to be interested in constructing buildings'. On the other, our buildings must be placed in view of the 'Unbuilt', the possibility of other buildings. We should measure our progress from the standpoint of the Unbuilt, of other possible foundations (DDR, 34-5). Building is necessary for Bhabha, much as law is necessary for Derrida. The Unbuilt – a strangely reified concept – seems equivalent to justice. By building in view of the Unbuilt, one builds while recognising that other things could have been built. But this doesn't change what is built, or by whom. It doesn't, for instance, raise issues of the right to self-build, or to squat, or the Lefebvrian "right to the city". It keeps top-down power in place.



Like Derrida, Bhabha likes to operate in the inbetween zone. He seeks 'justice' for marginalised and colonised groups, yet this justice often functions as something impossible. While waiting for this 'to-come' which necessarily never comes (see above, 304-8), colonial power is left intact. However, Bhabha's politics are not all about impossibility. He believes a certain kind of change is possible. It is possible to create a culture which articulates and lives with difference, in the sense Bhabha gives the term. Such a culture would have to be based on 'a non-sovereign notion of self' (TS, 212). In other words, it would require general acceptance of a Levinasian ethics in which the other is ethically primary over the self. It would require a compulsory social doctrine of co-constitutivity. It deconstructs the self, rather than the social system. This is, in effect, a variety of lifestyle politics – though it is hazy on concrete details.

The politics of authors such as Bhabha are ambiguous. Indeed, it might be argued that Bhabha promotes not so much a politics as an ethic, a theory of how to live well. For him, as for many critical theorists inspired by Derrida, Levinas and Lacan, the way to live well is to live in a way which entails recognition and celebration of failure, indeterminacy, contingency and ambivalence. It entails an existential orientation of recognising and

circling around an absent centre, an ironic or even melancholic (depressive) stance. The overarching affective tone of Bhabha's work is a kind of disempowering discomfort which is turned into a source of enjoyment through sublimation (see above, 386-93). Concrete political struggles are subordinated to the maintenance of this particular zone of affective experience. The tradition to which Bhabha belongs is not alone in this focus on ethics. For example, there is a focus on maintaining an ethos of activity, autonomy and empowerment in Nietzsche and Stirner, and an experience of balance and holism in Zen Buddhism. However, the Derridean tradition of ethical theory is arguably unprecedented in seeking to maintain a constant state of disjuncture and discomfort. This will, perhaps, prove to be one of the twentieth century's most original contributions to the history of thought.

While unusual, and theoretically interesting, this approach is also difficult to articulate as a political practice. It is often politically self-undermining and ineffectual. Any actual practice is always insufficiently 'responsible' or 'hospitable' (e.g. see Darling, 2011). The inability to ever succeed, or achieve affects of empowerment and joy, contributes to burnout. The almost religious aspect to the doctrine also renders it difficult for Bhabha's theories to be used by people who do not share his existential perspective. One has to believe in a particular existential, ontological, almost religious worldview for Bhabha's theories to work. They work by sublimating failure, lack, loss, inadequacy and antagonism into positive signs of the absent signifier itself – of an invisible and unknowable God, so to speak. (This is not just a figure of speech: Levinas, who arguably invented this ethos, formulated it in precisely these terms). Once they are seen in this way, negative affects arising from suffering become existentially bearable, even desirable. In theory, it then becomes possible to maintain a standpoint of reveling in failure, instead of succumbing to anger or being debilitated by anxiety, depression or fear. The moment of re-empowerment through contestation (Wood, 2001) becomes unnecessary. It also becomes possible to believe in ideals such as democracy, humanism, or socialism, without believing they have any real basis, and without one's belief being shaken by their failure. One puts up an effective wall against disbelief and disproof. This position is similar to that of mystics and monks through the ages. The unreality or contingency of the outer world renders it

bearable, relative to the divine moment, or the moment of mystical experience – Bhabha's inbetween space. But is this option available to most of those flayed by the psychological torment of precarity and insecurity? And if it is, can it be realised as an alternative to political revolt, instead of as a supplement to it?

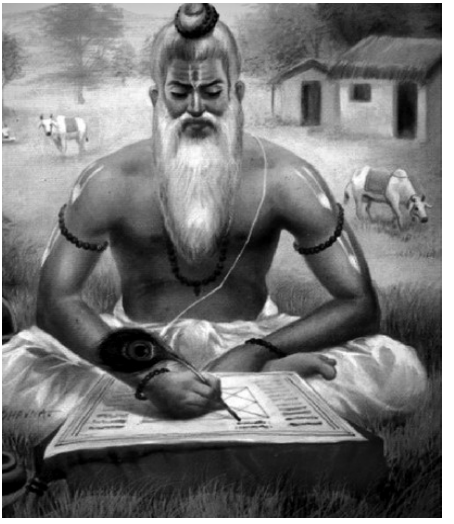
Much of the structure of Bhabha's theory militates against political effects. The position of most Lacanians and Derrideans is that people should adopt their new-found awareness of contingency and otherwise carry on just as before. They are not counselled to drop out, revolt, or otherwise make drastic changes. This style of theory makes it difficult to rebel against social conditions. If someone calls for revolt, they are quickly silenced by the claims that they are creating binaries or purism, projecting constitutive antagonism outwards, using the wrong 'temporality' (progressive rather than initiatory), 'centering' one position rather than another, encouraging practices which are not available to everyone, and so on. Beneath the nit-picking over details, there is often a root objection to the kind of empowered, outer-directed subjectivity which leads to revolt (see e.g. Soula M., 2011). Rebel subjectivities are suspect. The rebel is too sure of their subjectivity, too sure of the facts, too attached to progress or security, not sufficiently flayed by disjuncture and discomfort and anxiety. Rebels are exercising agency, ego, pride – the kinds of things Bhabha's theory condemns. Only the right kind of Derridean judge who recognises the contingency, violence, and necessity of each decision, and who is sufficiently 'responsible' to the co-constituted other, has a valid place as an agent in Bhabha's world.

If rebellion is foreclosed, this leaves little choice but to carry on without revolting. Yet

someone who carries on as before, in neoliberal precarity, will still be exposed to social sources of excessive stress and insecurity. Their tolerance for disjuncture may be raised, but it is unlikely to be limitless. People close to the margin of being unable to cope are helped to keep coping with the rising tide of precarity and anxiety for a little longer by adopting Bhabha's ethic. And this, in turn, keeps capitalism able to sustain its current regime of unbearable precarity and anxiety a little longer. In this, Bhabha's theory functions much like self-help therapies or CBT. It acts as a supplement which raises people's tolerance for neoliberal conditions. It does not reject and resist such conditions. At most, a heightened spiritual awareness will simply help people to conform and capitulate more effectively. (A similar objection is at the root of Deleuze and Guattari's critique of psychoanalysis, including Lacan). More likely, their social conditions will continue to overwhelm them – particularly if they are already marginal and oppressed. They will then feel ashamed for falling short of the idealised subjectivity presented in theory. Real people are not perfect Derridean judges. Comparison to such an ideal, in a context where affective conditions are against it, is a recipe for eternal self-hatred.

And this, perhaps, is the idea. There's a strong sense in Bhabha's work (and related approaches) of cutting the ego down to size. One cuts down the ego by undermining its pretensions to knowledge, power and so on – which are always insufficient relative to the 'Unbuilt' (DDR, 35), the full field of possibilities. One cuts the ego down to size by refusing simple solutions, political responses, and clear binaries. One cuts the ego down to size by frustrating its search for meaning with a nearly impenetrable writing style. One cuts the ego down to size by constantly bringing it into contact with the Lacanian Real or Derridean ambiguity, in other words, with the supposed constitutive impossibility of whatever the ego happens to want. This makes a certain amount of sense, if one assumes that the source of oppression is the 'modern subject', which almost by definition has an overinflated 'western' ego. But the egos of the excluded are already stigmatised and besieged. Their further breakdown brings about existential collapse. The Lacanian approach expressly refuses to build up the egos of the excluded as a counterpoint to the

oversized core ego. And it expressly refuses to build up some other part of the self – the Jungian Self, the id or desire, the shadow, the exiled part, etc – as a counterpoint to the ego. The weak ego, circling its awareness of its own insufficiency, tormented by the call of justice yet unable to fulfil it, is the end-point of the process of transformation. And this weak ego is hardly an adequate solution to problems which have their roots in the outer world, or even in other people's egos. It may or may not have learned to cope with precarity, but it is still just interpreting differently, not changing the world.



Principles or Pragmatism?

Bhabha's politics, like those of the Third Way, emphasise flexibility. It rejects the principled positions of traditional left politics. The left is criticised for replacing individual essentialism with collective essentialism, such as an essentialised notion of class (TS, 212). Politics needs to be 'strategic' rather than 'universalist' (RF, xvii). This type of formulation is common in poststructuralist writings, and seems to mean that politics should be manipulative, cynical and PR-focused, rather than based on principles. This is meant to be

a response to shifting conditions. It is one way of spinning the rejection of 'metanarratives', or big general stories. For Bhabha, new forms of struggle are constantly opening up. It is impossible to engage adequately with these new forms on the basis of old principles (TS, 216). Hence, politics is to be pragmatic, not principled. It needs less piety and more negotiation (TS, 28). It is to seek to negotiate meaning in whatever context happens to prevail in a certain time and place. Politics is rhetorical manipulation.

Bhabha defends this apparently hypocritical, cynical position as reflecting the basic nature of social life. Negotiation is not simply 'selling out' one's principles. Rather, it is how effective practice occurs. Bhabha sees change happening mainly through a 'continuum' of 'small micromovements' (SPD, 370). The point is not 'to unveil the fullness of Man but to manipulate his representation' (LC, 62). Identities and positions are always negotiated through 'strategies' (SPD, 371). This view implies that power is necessarily transactional, and never dominatory – or perhaps, that transactional responses subvert dominatory power. For example, Bhabha's main interest in the miners' strike is not in the confrontation between male workers and the New Right. It is in subverting the idea that the struggle was *only* between these groups, because working-class women engaged in agency distinct from both (LC, 27-8).

According to Bhabha, revolutionary moments are impossible, because of the ambivalence involved in discourse (LC, 30). As a Lacanian, Bhabha distrusts the desire to resolve social issues in a future harmony or to return to a pure origin. For Lacan, these political desires express the deeper, impossible desire for a return to an imaginary pre-Oedipal situation of abundance. They fuel processes of splitting, exclusion and violence. For example, Bhabha argues that the desire for a pure origin is at the root of colonial fetishism. It encourages both colonisers and colonised people to think of themselves in terms of essential,

stereotypical traits (LC, 75). This is also why "purity" is such a negatively-loaded term for Bhabha. It involves an 'impossible desire for a pure, undifferentiated origin' (LC, 81). This desire is associated with narcissism, with aggression, and with identities constantly haunted by otherness (LC, 77). Nonetheless, his goals are in a sense revolutionary: 'we must not merely change the *narratives* of our histories, but transform our sense of what it means to live, to be' (LC, 256). This is primarily a psychological or ideational change, but nonetheless, a radical one. Yet it may be a change into something similar to or worse than the present, rather than liberation (see above, 331-46). Change is not always for the better.

While Bhabha's goals may be radical, his methods are not. For Bhabha, all politics is really negotiation or reform. Even revolutions are simply high-speed instances of 'reforms and reformulations' (TS, 216). Political change is an effect of negotiation. Social transformation therefore has no first or final act. There is no decisive revolution, or decisive defeat (LC, 30). In practice, this position leads to political gradualism, and the foreclosure of systemic change. Bhabha attempts to dress this position up as a type of radicalism. For him, the old left is too conservative. It seeks to fit new situations into old models, which is a conservative or reactionary reflex (TS, 216). This is basically the position of the *Marxism Today* group, and later, the Third Way (see below, Chapter 12). "Conservative" here means repetitive or principled, rather than its usual political meanings. Despite his claims to the name "radical", Bhabha seems to emphasise negotiating with the status quo, rather than rejecting it (Huddart, 2006:97). In this, his position is resolutely reformist. It refuses to follow through the theoretical deconstruction of authoritative texts with a political anti-authoritarianism. His project is not actually about changing the political structure.

In Bhabha's theory, the other is always co-constituted with the self, and non-dualistic. This precludes most kinds of radical politics. For example, Bhabha demands that people should not 'homogenise or demonise the state', even when opposing it (DDR, 32). Like all institutions, it is to be kept in place and ironised. Hence, Bhabha condemns 'theoreticist

anarchism' which rejects all authority as the impossible pursuit of plenitude. Instead, he sees authority as an agonistic space, in which the subaltern can resist (LC, 110). The social world is seen as something 'beyond control' but not 'beyond accommodation' (LC, 12). In other words, recognising the impossibility of meaning, and of unifying the diverse positions and narratives, is necessary to achieve social coexistence.

According to Huddart, Bhabha encourages a deep acceptance of contingency. One is always in a condition of being thrown into a contingent situation. Theory cannot get us out of this predicament. Therefore, everyone needs to get used to working contingently, without guarantees or rigid principles (Huddart, 2006:13). Bhabha rejects 'celebratory, or utopian, self-marginalisation'. Instead, he calls for interventions into underlying justifications of modernity (D, 294).

In my view, this position is dangerously close to social submersion. It treats the situation of vulnerability to neoliberal precarity as inescapable. On one level, of course situations are contingent. Stable regimes have their basis in historical conditions which can change. But precarity, the 'hell of the absence of guarantees' (Guattari and Negri, 1990:76), is actually central to the reproduction of neoliberal capitalism. By keeping people vulnerable, capitalism can blackmail people into accepting intolerable conditions in society and at work (Lorey, 2010). Building other sources of security and 'guaranteed' survival – such as support networks, solidarity economies, and subsistence – is an important part of a radical politics which would undercut neoliberalism. Also, having an ethos and related principles is not at all a denial of contingency. A personal ethos is itself founded on the absence of guaranteed meaning (see Robinson, 2017). By acting pragmatically, one conforms performatively to the belief that there is a fixed outer world which is guaranteed, even if

one "knows better". By holding to one's ethos no matter the circumstances, one remains an agent in the shifting field. One's ethos creates a boundary against the system's ruses which otherwise lead to recuperation. In contrast, Bhabha's position is fundamentally an ideology of incorporation into neoliberalism. Bhabha uses the signifier 'liberal' in a theoretical way. He basically refers to methodological individualism as 'liberalism'. This, in turn, allows him to adopt reformist, liberal *political* positions while claiming not to be 'liberal'.

Another aspect of Bhabha's approach is the subversion of authority. It loses its hegemony in the Gramscian sense, its ability to obtain passionate commitment. But it carries on having to 'rule' without being able to 'represent' (LC, 115). It does not obtain active support. This lack of support opens the space for the Derridean law/justice interplay (see above, 683-690). But nor is it overthrown. It carries on ruling without representing. In Gramscian terms, this suggests a situation of *permanent passive revolution*. The system will continue to rule, but without ever generating active commitment. In Gramsci, passive revolution is associated with state power and the dispersal of revolutionary energies. It is related to "Caesarism" or "Bonapartism", administrative control, corruption, patrimonialism, and the "beheading" of social movements through the incorporation of opposition leaders. It is ultimately a way to contain the passionate forces underpinning revolution.

Bhabha's rejection of principled politics initially seems appealing to many people. It channels frustration with dogmatic political positions such as those of orthodox Marxists. It draws on awareness of the limits of knowledge, the valuing of change, flexibility, and innovation in neoliberalism, and the 'strategic' adaptability associated with effective political opportunism. Such elements of its appeal are articulated to an agenda which apparently seeks to subvert colonialism and benefit colonised peoples wherever possible, without worrying about ideological fidelity. It looks, therefore, a lot more realistic and achievable than various radical positions. Yet, like the Third Way, it leads to a politics

which may be open to blowing with the winds, and correspondingly ineffective or unreliable in the medium term. Pragmatists often become unnecessarily complicit in seemingly stable regimes, and discredit their own belief-systems as well as themselves. They quickly become ineffective when pragmatic circumstances change. For example, the regime-complicit 'state feminism' of countries like Tunisia and Romania is exemplary of pragmatism akin to Bhabha's. Feminist activists used openings provided by authoritarian social orders to win important reforms. But ultimately, their association with regimes which were later overthrown has discredited not only the activists themselves, but the whole feminist project. It has allowed youth radicalism to instead be captured by nationalist and Islamic conservative tendencies (Khalil, 2014; Magyari-Vincze, 2006). Is the same thing happening today, as the Third Way suffers electoral collapse and leeches voters to the populist/fascist right? Is this an effect of the left's loss of principles and its entanglement in neoliberalism? It is certainly conceivable that this may be the case.

Bhabha's approach also goes against the main trends in radical (movement) politics – even radical politics around the issues of race and colonialism which Bhabha emphasises. Movement politics plays little role in Bhabha's work, perhaps because it is frequently antagonistic rather than hybrid. The #blacklivesmatter movement, for example, uses mainly antagonistic tropes. For Bhabha, it would presumably be more useful to find hybrid positions between police and black people – for example, black police, or police-community reconciliation groups, or black leaders in mainstream parties. Yet these are the lines through which black radicalism in America has been weakened and recuperated! Movement politics typically involves proud, decisive action based on principles or passions. The Derridean subversion of this affective basis impairs movement politics. For example, people become too worried about the possibility that they're wrong to take the kind of decisive actions which make social movements effective. Even if they end up acting, they do so in a spirit of self-abasement rather than self-confidence. This is unsustainable and leads to rapid burnout. In general, therefore, the importation of Derridean-style poststructuralism into social movements has been destructive and

disruptive of these movements themselves, not of the dominant system.

There is another problem here, which is how Bhabha can use the signifier 'radical' if radical principles do not exist. If there are no principles, is there ever such a thing as selling-out? If not, how can radical politics be distinguished from reactionary politics, or transgression from the reproduction of the dominant order? Bhabha seems to misunderstand the challenges facing radicals. When seeking to resist dominant regimes in practice, the pressure to capitulate is very strong. This is not pressure to give up a particular model of resistance, but pressure to abandon opposition to the dominant system as such. But the demand to capitulate will often come disguised as flexibility, strategy and tactics, and modernisation. For example, Third Way campaigners against the British National Union of Students' demand for free education claimed to be rejecting outdated dogmas, embracing modernisation, and strategically engaging with the Blairite government. Their successful capitulation made it easier for this government to introduce university fees and abolish maintenance grants. But it may well have looked, to people versed in theories like Bhabha's and those of *Marxism Today*, as if it was simply a strategic means to get a voice at the table by inserting oneself into the then-dominant Third Way discourse. This shows that strategic flexibility facilitates, or encourages, capitulation. For this reason, radicals of all stripes are understandably concerned about being co-opted, incorporated, recuperated and so on. Often, holding to one's principles is a strong counterbalance to such pressures, and therefore also to the kind of incorporated 'diversity'

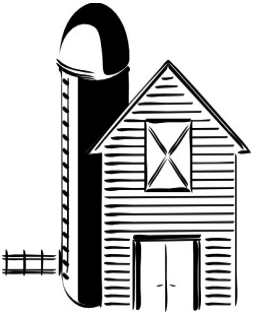
Bhabha denounces. Poststructuralists and postcolonial theorists have sought to do without any such boundary against the dominant system, but their political record does not indicate that this was an effective move.

Bhabha's gradualism arguably stems from a poststructuralist view of power as diffuse and non-localised. Power is fluid. It is not fixed in some prior instance or single location. It has to be re-established in each specific gesture of authority. This means it can be disarticulated or unfixed from its fixed references (SPD, 378). This position fails to explain why power is sometimes extremely stable. It exaggerates the power of individual actors to change social structures simply by altering the articulation of signs. The fact that prison guards' power has to be constantly reproduced in daily acts of control and in the prison architecture itself is not a fact which makes escape, release, revolt, or power-reversal any easier to achieve in practice. The guards continue to follow a script which continues to work, and which adapts as contradictions are found.

It is true that guarantees and principles are not present in contingent situations. They are products of human meaning-production. Nevertheless, this process of meaning-production is important. It brings coherence to experiences and direction to lives. Living with constant unpredictability and meaninglessness is emotionally unsustainable. People become overwhelmed with anxiety, depression and panic. Historically, social systems and political movements – not only modern ones, but also indigenous and non-western groups – use social symbolism, economic distribution and systems of knowledge to provide 'guarantees' or existential security. Indigenous cosmologies, for instance, insist that knowledge is local and relational, but they do not posit a condition of life without guarantees. Rather, the harmonisation of distinct principles and respect for the full range of creatures and beings is taken to guarantee abundance (de Cadena, 2015; Gegeo, 1998). Similarly, not all theorists who reject the idea of outer certainties reject meaning-formation. Theorists such as Friedrich Nietzsche, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Hakim Bey accept the premise that there are no outer guarantees of meaning. Nevertheless, they emphasise

the importance of bringing self-directed meaning to life, based on desire or intentionality.

Authors such as Bhabha tend to reject this move, because they reject ego-identity. By resisting subjectivity as such, they also resist the formation of colonial subjectivities and colonial (or other) regimes of power. Something which is utterly meaningless is also utterly ungovernable. However, they also destroy the possibility of affirmative, non-oppressive forms of power. They destroy the possibility of oppressive meaning by creating a desert in which meaning is impossible. This may be sufficient if the only political task is to disempower an adversary, or to disempower one's own ego. But it creates an emotionally and socially unsustainable world, in which the only available affects are different varieties of suffering. Something which is utterly meaningless and out-of-control is not simply ungovernable by those in power, or even by those seeking to take over power. It is also something in which one cannot exercise affirmative powers to survive or flourish.



Without general principles, context becomes all-important. According to Bhabha, political significance is an effect of a particular situation, and can vary wildly. Political positions are not radical or bourgeois, progressive or reactionary, separately from their context, or conditions of discourse (LC, 22). This is true, in the sense that a symbol (such as wearing a face covering) can have many different meanings depending on context (as religious

devoutness, as defiance of Islamophobia, as political disguise, as an anarchist statement, as the mask of an executioner or of left- or right-wing paramilitaries, and so on). However, Bhabha frames the statement in such a way that it seems to preclude everyday political action. The context will seem different to each person, and big contextual changes requiring changed strategies will be visible to some but not others. However, Bhabha implies there is a real context which can be discerned through postcolonial discourse analysis. There must be *a* context which decides which actions are "radical". Everyday activists therefore need vanguard theorists like Bhabha to tell them the real contextual meaning – or else they remain naively essentialist, and subject to the mutations of power. In addition, there must always be some point of evaluation from which a contextualised gesture is assessed – and this point will vary with one's values, or political orientations. This standpoint of selection – of Bhabha's 'commitment' – is present but disguised in his works, and in similar traditions of poststructuralism. The insistence on context can also serve as a handy excuse for double standards, and for imposing a particular framing on what are in fact diverse contexts. For example, it is possible to ignore the immediate context of an image or a joke by insisting that its 'real' context is race and racism. The standpoint, or lens of interpretation, is decisive in determining which context 'counts'.

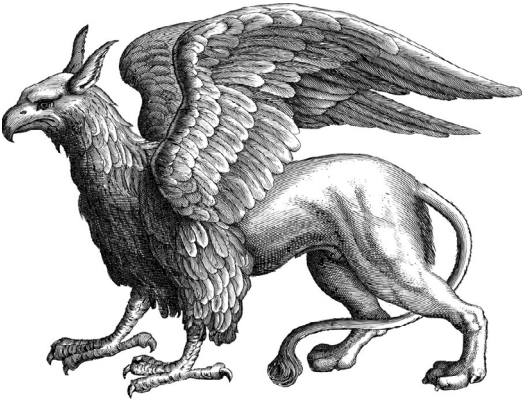
Ultimately, Bhabha treats radical change as impossible. He seems to reject the possibility of social transformation beyond the structures he takes as constitutive. Liberation, revolution or utopia is simply a glimpse, a fleeting image, which appears when the all-encompassing structure is ruptured through transgression. This is similar to how liberation is initially felt, for instance, in Deleuze/Guattari or Bey. But Bhabha's version is very different, in that it cannot extend into a field encompassing all of life. Rather, it is always temporary, and necessarily degenerates back into systemic closure. The experience of a failed revolution, of a revolution which is captured and recuperated by the dominant system, is the only experience of revolution recognised in Bhabha's theory. This is, perhaps, an accurate account of the anti-colonial revolution, and the 1960s/70s revolutions more broadly. Yet it forecloses the possibility that the future might be

different. By locating failure at an ontological level, Bhabha dooms humanity to endless repetition of this failure.

There often seems to be a lack of follow-through in Bhabha's work. He gestures towards another world without ever giving any clear sense of what it might look like or how to get there. Hence, Han argues that Bhabha's 'third space' is constantly deferred. Bhabha posits the possibility of change, of other worlds. Yet he never specifies what form change might take, or what another world might look like. He points to a third space, without actually building one (Han, 2005:8). It's hard to say what's going on here. Does Bhabha believe that change is unachievable, or simply that it cannot be predicted in advance? Does actually achieving change undermine the theoretical effect of opening the third space to begin with? Or does Bhabha believe that any change someone can imagine today is by definition still inside modernity, and not radical enough? Han suggests that Bhabha is actually afraid that any successful change might create a new structure of oppression (2005:9). He thinks it is better to keep the future open by remaining in the liminal zone. This makes sense, if (binary) language is seen as the root of oppression. From a Derridean point of view, an effective change would entail a recreation of a definite, literal language, more-or-less stable identities, and so on. This would leave us more oppressed than we are in a system which has been partially subverted by marginality. However, Bhabha's strategy entails reproducing the present, even while suspending its efficacy. It creates an empty hope in a future which must never be allowed to come.

There are, however, further contradictions. Despite its reformism, Bhabha's political approach is often sharply antagonistic (see above, 274-6). For Bhabha, minority emergence is passionate, partial, and charged with antagonism. However, such antagonism is always seen in terms of co-constitutivity. Bhabha's theory denies any kind of fundamental social antagonism which is deeper, or more real, than the constitutive split in language. His political perspective tends to involve an agonistic version of existing liberal democracy, with increased awareness of contingency and increased recognition of multiple discourses,

but with institutions left largely unchanged. The neoliberal 'trunk' of the existing global system is weakened, but not overcome.



Hybridity is also central to Bhabha's politics (see above, 347-55). Yet hybridity is taken to be a characteristic of power and resistance. One subverts a dominant order by hybridising, transgressing, and internally deconstructing it. Yet a dominant order is always already hybridising, transgressing and internally deconstructing itself. This process is built into the nature of social order (and language, and identity) as such. This means that conserving, reforming, and overthrowing an order are virtually indistinguishable, at least on the basis of the categories Bhabha explicitly provides. It is fair to assume that he *does* see a difference between (say) defending the British Raj in India and deliberately or unconsciously subverting it, or between Salman Rushdie's hybridity and the hybridity of Rushdie's critics. But he does not provide a clear theoretical basis for the distinction. Probably the distinction is something like Derrida's idea of 'justice'. Because the marginalised have experiences of disjuncture, they are more aware of contingency and violence, and make more 'responsible' decisions. Or, some people accept contingency whereas others deny it.

CHAPTER 12

Party Politics: Bhabha and Marxism Today

In terms of institutional politics, Bhabha's politics are close to those of the *Marxism Today* (or New Times) group. This was a faction in the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) in the 1970s-90s. The magazine *Marxism Today* was an official CPGB publication, but it was largely captured by the reformist or Eurocommunist wing of the party and acted as its standard bearer. The *Marxism Today* group is sometimes called 'liquidationist' because it reputedly wished to dissolve the Party. Its apparent location on the 'extreme' or 'hard' left is misleading. The group emerged from the communist tradition, and maintained a degree of rhetorical radicalism. It also tended to support new social movements, particularly identity politics. But in other ways, the group was situated to the right of traditional social-democracy and the Labour Party (Britain's major left-of-centre electoral party) in the 1980s. In some respects, *Marxism Today* prefigured Blairism and the Third Way. The Blairites were a faction who took over the Labour Party from the right. They embraced the neoliberal economics and authoritarian populism of Thatcher's Conservatives and ruled Britain during the 2000s. Leading Blairites, such as Charles Leadbeater and Martin Kettle, are former members of the *Marxism Today* group. In terms of the categories discussed above, *Marxism Today* tended to be highly interested in institutional politics and lifestyle politics, but less interested in movement politics. They provide Bhabha's main link to the world of institutional politics.

Bhabha's politics thus stand in an ambiguous relationship to Marxism. While Bhabha vocally denounces Marxism, he does so from a position which has evolved from Marxist roots. Marxism is a diverse, contested body of theory, which Bhabha tends to associate with orthodox Marxism in particular. 'Classical Marxism' generally refers to the theories of Marx and his immediate associates, while 'orthodox Marxism' refers to the simplified, rather dogmatic version of Marxist theory which was promoted by the Soviet government

(and to a lesser extent, by reformist socialists and some types of Trotskyists). Orthodox Marxism is a teleological belief-system. This means that it maintains that history is moving progressively, towards a desirable end-point. It is closely associated with the idea that industrial growth and technological improvement create the conditions for socialism. This is just the kind of deterministic, transcendent, metanarrative approach Bhabha hates. This position was relatively common in movement politics and in academia in the 1970s-80s, both in Britain and India. Indeed, it is not much of a stretch of the imagination to think that Bhabha may have honed his own beliefs in discursive combat with orthodox Marxists.

In the Margins: Eurocommunism and the History of Communism

Until the late 1920s, European socialism was a diverse movement. Major socialist parties had moved away from revolutionary politics. However, revolutionary groups continued to proliferate on a smaller scale, including 'maximalist' democratic socialists, anarchists, syndicalists, left-wing communists (such as Luxemburg, Bordiga, Pannekoek and Gorter), early Western Marxists (such as Gramsci, Korsch and Lukacs), and 'council communists' (who believed in workers' councils as the nexus of a new society). These movements were given major boosts by the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the workers' councils and revolutionary movements of the early 1920s.

The Russian Revolution began as a mass uprising against the ruling monarchy. It ended in a brutal authoritarian left-wing dictatorship. The story of when and how the Russian Revolution turned sour is told in many different ways in the socialist movement and beyond. For some, the seeds of authoritarianism were already present in Leninism. For others, the revolution was 'betrayed' or 'degenerated' into Stalinism. What is generally agreed is that the initial revolt of 1917 had involved diverse socialists of different backgrounds, but by the 1930s, the country had become a monolithic dictatorship under Stalin. From the late 1920s, the Comintern – an international organisation of Communist Parties, largely controlled from Russia – sought to shut down the diversity of revolutionary socialism in other parts of Europe. This process involved the 'Bolshevisation' of Communist Parties, or the creation of new parties on the Russian model. The blueprint for these parties was not the Bolsheviks of 1917, but the highly bureaucratic, dictatorial Russian Party of the 1930s. In many cases, purges and splits occurred. These splits are the origins of many of today's Trotskyist and left-communist groups. Small anarchist groups and left-wing factions within social-democratic parties also continued to exist throughout this period. But the Communist Parties, with their foreign sponsorship, strong organisation and established name, were largely able to monopolise politics to the left of social democracy for thirty years. Rivals were marginalised or excluded. In some cases (such as Greece and Spain), the Stalinists even had their opponents killed! This was also the period in which fascism was rising and space for legal left-wing politics was being closed down. Most existing radicals either recanted their unorthodox views, abandoned Marxism and the left, or were killed by either fascists or Stalinists. Gramsci died in a fascist prison. Trotsky was murdered by a Stalinist assassin. Luxemburg was killed by proto-fascists during the failed German revolution after World War 1. Walter Benjamin was assassinated either by Nazis or Stalinists while fleeing Nazi-occupied France. Louis Althusser spent much of the war in a fascist prisoner-of-war camp -

an experience which no doubt influenced the all-controlling, prison-like model through which he interpreted social life.

Despite their homogenisation, Communist Parties emerged as major political forces in several European countries after World War 2, particularly France, Spain and Italy. The Communists had played a heroic role in resisting fascism during World War 2. They had large, loyal constituencies of lifelong supporters. Communism had also gained new significance in Cold War-era Europe. It now stood for European resistance to Americanisation and American global power. Soviet money and leadership helped sustain these parties. Official propaganda projected an idealised vision of Soviet reality.

However, cracks soon started to show. Stalin died in 1953. His successor Khrushchev denounced some of his policies and his 'cult of personality' in 1956, and for the first time, recognised that atrocities were committed during the Stalin period. Also in 1956, the Soviet Union invaded Hungary, which was part of its East European 'sphere of influence'. Hungary was Communist, but was pursuing an independent path. The Soviets used tanks against Hungarian workers who were resisting and protesting against the invasion. These events were repeated in Czechoslovakia in 1968. The 'Prague Spring' in Czechoslovakia is sometimes seen as an Eastern European equivalent to May 1968 in France. Workers and students formed popular grassroots organisations and fought against the Soviet invaders. In 1961, the Soviet and Chinese Communist Parties fell out. These four events (Khrushchev's speech, the invasions of Hungary and Czechoslovakia, and the Sino-Soviet Split) undermined the unity and aura of communism as a global movement. They also set off splits and debates

within Communist Parties between supporters and opponents of the invasions, pro- and anti-Stalin factions, and pro-Russia and pro-China factions. Hard-line Stalinists, akin to those who supported 'sending in the tanks', are still known as 'tankies' today.

Eurocommunism was strongest in countries where the Communist Party had become a mass party with significant popular support: Italy, Spain and France. It was arguably a social-democratic, or politically opportunistic tendency. Eurocommunists generally weakened earlier communist ideas of radical social transformation and sought to capture power within existing liberal or "bourgeois" democracies. Deradicalisation of Communist Parties was also part of the reason for this. Mass Communist Parties predictably attracted people who saw them as a road to national political power. Capturing these parties gave access to a loyal support base, an effective revolutionary 'brand-name' and a historical legacy. The 'iron law of oligarchy' had its predictable effects, promoting conformity, bureaucracy and conservatism.

However, Eurocommunism was also a result of disillusionment. The revelations about Stalin's abuses, the Soviet attacks on other communist countries, and the stagnation and bleakness of life in the Soviet Union were contributing factors. On the other hand, social-democracy was very successful in this period, and exerted a force of attraction on communists. The difference between communists and social-democrats had already narrowed, as most European Communist Parties embraced an electoral route to political power after 1945. It was hoped that imitating social-democracy would make the Communist Parties more electorally successful. On economic questions, Eurocommunists were generally less radical than Stalinists or Trotskyists.

New social movements were also beginning to inspire many of the Communist leaders. Although they were usually less anti-capitalist than Stalinists, Eurocommunists were sometimes more radical than Stalinists in terms of their support for causes such as feminism and gay rights. Because of its authoritarianism, Stalinism was rather conservative on a lot of social issues. Stalinist regimes took some tentative steps to promote gender equality, disability rights and multiculturalism. They had large welfare states which benefited the worse-off. But, over time, they also came to embrace traditional gender roles and nationalism. They had strong armies and police forces, usually practiced military conscription, greatly limited personal "lifestyle" freedoms, and discouraged subcultures and countercultures. They were homophobic, and sometimes sexually puritanical. Communist Parties were nearly always led by older white or majority-nationality men who, in Communist-ruled countries, were usually children of a self-perpetuating bureaucratic elite. And the communist vision was heavily intertwined with the celebration of industrial production and work. Stalinism thus resonated poorly with the emerging social movements resisting Fordist forms of social control in the west – movements directed against social conservatism, sexual repression, militarism, and social control. While western rebels saw a lot of themselves in the Chinese Cultural Revolution and the newer "Third World" revolutionary movements, they had more in common with Eastern European dissidents than with the old Communist Party rulers. Eurocommunists thus sometimes ended up allied with anarchists, Trotskyists and Maoists in a common challenge to the communist or social-democratic old guard. They rebranded Communist Parties so as to appeal to New Left social movements.

Eurocommunists also sought to reduce the control of the Soviet Party over other Communist Parties. As part of this strategy, they sought to challenge the imposition of rigid Soviet-backed doctrines to different national contexts. The ideas of pragmatism, strategy and flexibility played central roles in building bridges between orthodox Marxist doctrines and the opportunities available to nationally-based parties. Eurocommunists often deployed sideways or tenuous readings of Marxist texts to justify strategic departures from orthodox models. Some of them deployed a particular reading of Gramsci's ideas about hegemony and civil society to argue for an institutional rather than revolutionary approach to politics in western Europe. Gramsci's close companion Togliatti had become the leader of the Italian Communist Party and was instrumental to this process – although Gramsci's writings often seem closer to council communism and syndicalism than Eurocommunism. The Eurocommunist rhetoric of subverting the system from the inside, using existing structures for radical ends, and avoiding outright antagonism in favour of radical cultural transformation echoes with later poststructuralist terminology, such as Bhabha's. Eurocommunists rejected revolutionary means, if not necessarily revolutionary goals. They explicitly committed to existing 'democratic' state structures and sought to broaden their appeal from the working-class to middle-class public-sector workers and the new social movements.

By the 1970s, the Eurocommunists had firm control of the Italian, Finnish and Spanish Communist Parties, and were a strong minority presence in France. In Italy, Togliatti and later Berlinguer reinterpreted Gramsci's calls for contestation of everyday power-structures and ideologies as a basis for political gradualism. There was to be a 'long march through the institutions', with revolution only coming after the Communists had won power in all the institutions of civil society. Struggles in fields such as culture and media were important parts of this overall strategy. In Spain, which was still a dictatorship, the PCE under Santiago Carrillo focused on achieving a transition to

democracy. In France, the Eurocommunists briefly took control before losing it in the 1980s. In Greece, the Stalinists held out and the Eurocommunists split from the party.

Initially, Eurocommunists often seemed a breath of fresh air in relation to the rigid doctrines of Stalinism (or 'Marxism-Leninism') which were previously imposed on Communist Parties by the Soviet Union. However, the tendency often moderated official Communist politics to bring it closer to western European social-democracy. This was to have harmful effects in the struggles of the 1960s-70s.

In many cases, Eurocommunists acted as defenders of capitalism or of institutional orthodoxy against more radical movements – *autonomia*, Situationism, Maoism, Trotskyism, anarchism and so on. For example, the Italian Communist Party (PCI) was a declared enemy of autonomia. The PCI sought to undermine a university occupation in its stronghold of Bologna, and was in power when tanks were deployed against autonomists. Nationally, the PCI had been locked out of power by an alliance of the Christian Democrats and Social Democrats since World War 2. To gain access to power, they allied with the conservative Christian Democrats in 1976-78, going as far as to vote in support of a minority Christian Democrat (conservative) government. Similarly, the French Communist Party tried to defuse the strikes and protests of 1968, accusing protesters of being regime-hired saboteurs.

The British Communist Party (CPGB) was never anywhere near as large as those in Spain, Italy and France. At its peak in the 1940s, it won over 100,000 votes and two seats in parliament, and had around 60,000 members (still far short of the PCI's 1.7 million or the Labour Party's 487,000). It was marginalised due to the success of the far more influential Labour left, and the refusal of the Labour Party to allow the CPGB to affiliate. The CPGB had a bit of influence in universities, trade unions and student politics. However, it was in decline by the 1970s, partly because of events in the Soviet Union and the invasions of Hungary and Czechoslovakia. It moved away from being a political party and towards being a lobbying group. The Eurocommunists became the leading faction in the CPGB by the late 1970s. In 1977, they obtained control of the Party magazine *Marxism Today*, which is today synonymous with the Eurocommunist faction in the UK. At its height, *Marxism Today* had a print run of 20,000 copies a month, and was available at mainstream outlets such as WH Smith. The grouping has a bad reputation in trade union and student politics. In the unions, it focused on electing left-leaning candidates to leading positions, at the expense of grassroots mobilising. It criticised confrontational trade union tactics. In student politics, the grouping often played a conservative role, against more radical pressures from the Labour and Trotskyist left.

In 1989, most of the Soviet Union's eastern European allies managed to break away from Soviet power. In 1991, the Soviet Union broke up. The Soviet Union's successor states, such as Russia and Ukraine, and its former allies in eastern Europe, such as Hungary, became capitalist countries. At this point, most Communist Parties in western Europe either collapsed or split. The CPGB was dissolved, officially becoming a think tank, and *Marxism Today* ceased publication (though it returned for a one-off in 1998).

A number of small CPGB offshoots continue to exist – including the trade-union-oriented CPB, who continue to publish the daily *Morning Star*, the CPGB, who publish the *Weekly Worker*, and the outright Stalinist NCP. The Eurocommunists continued during the 1990s as the Democratic Left and then the New Times Network, with a magazine called *New Times*. The new magazine focused heavily on culture, race, sexuality and gender. Since 2000 the group has no official existence but persists in various academic and policy networks.

In Europe, many Eurocommunist groups continued as separate parties, sometimes under the name Democratic Left. In Italy, the Communist Party splintered in the 1990s, at around the same time as the country's other two major parties – the Social Democrats and the Christian Democrats. The Eurocommunist splinter, the Democratic Left, became Italy's largest centre-left party. It was the leading force in the coalitions which ruled Italy in 1995-2001, and which turned into the Democratic Party in 2006. In Greece, the Stalinists retained control of the Communist Party (KKE), which still exists, and the Eurocommunists eventually became part of the former ruling party Syriza. Another Eurocommunist outgrowth, the Initiative for Catalonia, ruled the autonomous region of Catalonia from 2004-2010. The term Eurocommunist is specific to Europe, but similar tendencies have appeared in Communist Parties in Asia, Africa and Latin America. For example, the Chilean Communists were arguably to the right of Allende's Socialists in the 1970s, and the South African Communist Party, which is part of the ruling African National Congress (ANC), has acquiesced in neoliberalism in the 1990s.

Two different Communist Party splinters, the CPI and the CPI (M), are part of regional-level governments in Bhabha's native India. They have been involved in Chinese-style development of Special Economic Zones (SEZ) in the regions they control, some of which have led to fierce clashes with workers and peasants. For example in 2008, attempts to dispossess peasants in Singur, West Bengal, to build

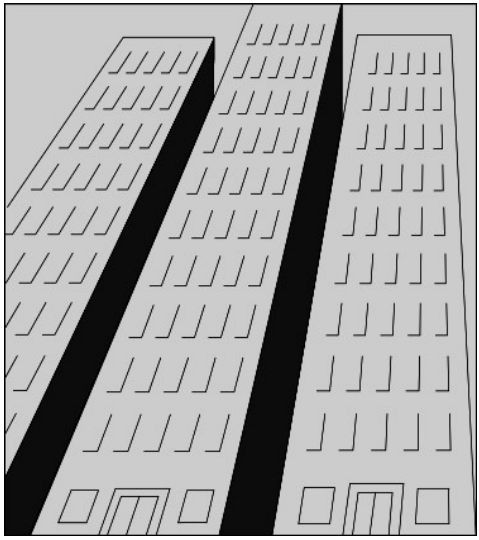
Bengal, to build a car factory were defeated by massive protests and blockades. In 2007, 14 peasants were massacred by police during protests against another SEZ project in Nandigram, West Bengal. The CPI (M) was leading a Left Front government in West Bengal and pursuing rapid industrialisation at the time. Despite this aggressive developmentalism, the CPI and CPI (M) have also opposed national-level neoliberal policies. A smaller, Maoist group with about 10,000 fighters is fighting an armed insurgency in some of the poorest parts of India.

Emerging inside the previously rather orthodox Communist Party, the *Marxism Today* group both critiqued and drew on orthodox Marxism. The group retained the orthodox Marxist faith in historical progress, but they no longer believed in the established models of class struggle and socialism. The group believed a new historical period had begun in the 1980s (a view now widely embraced). This idea of an epochal shift was known as the New Times theory. The *Marxism Today* group believed that Fordism – the post-war, industrial economic order – was being replaced by post-Fordism. Post-Fordism is roughly the same as neoliberalism. "Thatcherism" – the conservative, authoritarian-populist approach of Margaret Thatcher – was thus very different from earlier conservatism. It reflected social changes which had weakened the traditional working-class and produced new forms of politics based on identity and consumption. Certain aspects of this account are also put forward by authors as diverse as world-systems theorist Samir Amin, Marxist David Harvey, post-autonomist Antonio Negri, anarchist Hakim Bey, and poststructuralist post-Situationist Jean Baudrillard. Some authors talk about the transition to neoliberalism either as a world-historical defeat of progressive forces, a deepening of capitalist oppression, a new stage repeating core elements of the same system, or the beginnings of capitalist collapse.

However, as teleological Marxists, the *Marxism Today* group believed that the transition to post-Fordism is progressive. It is a movement towards a higher stage of the economy. In teleological Marxism, economic progress and modernisation are desirable, whatever their effects. Each social transition is a step up the ladder towards socialism, and an expression of extra-human historical forces which cannot be defied. *Marxism Today* thus bought into, and even pioneered, accounts which provided cheerleading for the 'new economy', knowledge industries, networked production, deindustrialisation, financialisation, globalisation, and so on. They saw traditional Marxists and social-democrats as reactionary – trying to defend old institutions such as industry, trade unions and the welfare state, or pointlessly acting-out old models of politics from an earlier historical period. They believed the right-wing 'Thatcherites' had seen and run with the changed context, while the left had failed to keep up. They thus called for a 'new politics' for the new times. They abandoned the goal of overthrowing capitalism, instead seeking to adapt to the existing world. Instead of a big universal vision, left-wing parties should create alliances of different groups and causes. The *Marxism Today* group were enthusiastic about 'rainbow coalitions' of oppressed and left-of-centre groups, and about 'identity politics'. In effect, they urged the left to fight Thatcherism on the Thatcherite terrain of mediatised politics, culture, consumerism, and post-class identity, while also trying to capture the energy of new social movements such as those around gender, race and sexuality.

The *Marxism Today* group were a belated, British variant of the Eurocommunist current which had swept the much larger Communist Parties of several European countries in the 1970s and earlier. Several aspects of their rhetoric were later incorporated into the Blairite project – particularly the idea of a 'New Britain' and 'new politics', and the valuing of change and newness almost for their own sake. The group was initially enthusiastic about Blair, as shown in the volume *The Blair Agenda* (Perryman ed., 1997), which featured enthusiastically pro-Blairite contributions by many New Times veterans. However, in 1998 *Marxism Today* returned for a special issue criticising Blairism. Academics associated with

the group initially embraced Gramsci and Althusser, but many later switched to Foucault, Derrida and Lacan.



In a piece from the 1980s, Bhabha explicitly endorsed the project of the *Marxism Today* group. He oriented to the Labour Party, which in the 1980s was a social-democratic party. Labour was urged to build an inclusive electoral majority through articulating and negotiating different positions, while abandoning its 'principles' and its orientation to the working-class (LC, 28). This position foreshadows the later 'reforms' by Neil Kinnock and especially Tony Blair. According to Bhabha, Labour should also represent itself as a 'solidary collective will' producing a 'modern image of the future', an image which should itself produce the politicised populations it posits (LC, 29). The terminology Bhabha uses is drawn directly from Laclau and Mouffe (1984), who were also associated with the *Marxism Today* group. Although there is no evidence that he was directly involved in the group, this affinity helps to situate Bhabha in the field of party politics.

The affinities between Bhabha and Eurocommunism are not limited to this piece. One of the subsections in *The Location of Culture* is titled 'New Times' – the theory promulgated by *Marxism Today* (LC, 176). In this subsection, Bhabha argues that subject-positions are

incommensurable. They can only be articulated politically through an imaginary (or vision) which weaves them together, on the basis of a structuralist view of language (LC, 176). This is also the position taken by Laclau and Mouffe. Its political conclusions tend to be reformist. Bhabha also enthusiastically embraces Stuart Hall's model for rebuilding the Labour Party as a rainbow alliance (LC, 28). Hall was one of the leading figures in the *Marxism Today*/New Times group. In a later piece, Bhabha nuances his view of alliance politics. He believes such politics becomes necessary because power has become so complex that 'one cannot fathom who the enemy is even when they are sitting inside the room'. The enemy is too complex to form a solidarity bloc against. At this point, opponents tend to turn on one another. It is still important, Bhabha adds, to understand that there are lines which cannot be crossed without entering into collaborationism (RCA, 21).

In another text, Bhabha admits to having a 'great deal of time' for Laclau and Mouffe's politics (SPD, 376). Their model of hegemony seeks to fix meanings. However, it also recognises a general context of 'iteration and contingency' (SPD, 377). This is similar to the role Bhabha proposes for the Labour Party. Bhabha embraces Laclau and Mouffe's view that political processes, not everyday life, produce identities such as class and gender (LC, 26). He does not recognise a level of social construction prior to politics. Bhabha also agrees with Rorty's view that solidarity has to be constructed by combining 'little pieces', or particularities. It does not come from an 'ur-language', or a language in which all recognise themselves automatically (LC, 235). The resultant strategy of building coalitions among different subject-positions, without metanarratives, is common to Bhabha, Laclau and Mouffe, and *Marxism Today*. Yet there are also a few important differences. In a sense, we are *not* in New Times according to Bhabha. We are still inside a colonial horizon. Globalisation has speeded up because of digital technology. However, mercantilism and colonialism were also forms of globalisation (SPD, 383). He also repeats Laclau and Mouffe's argument that class is no longer primary and social subjectivity is now diversified among contingent, differentiated positions (CIB, 55).

In the Margins: Laclau and Mouffe

Hegemony and Socialist Strategy, by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, is a major work of post-Marxist political theory. It was published in Britain in 1985, at the height of Thatcherism and around the time of the defeat of the miners' strike. Earlier versions of some of the material had appeared in *Marxism Today*. Like Bhabha, Laclau and Mouffe believe in the 'language model' (see above, 81-3). People are only 'subjects', or actors, because of how they are socially constructed. Social construction occurs through differential binaries. Meaning arises from the self-other relation, and self and other are co-constituted. Nothing is 'fully present', with its own identity. Everything is constructed by its connections and exclusions.

The book criticises the alleged class essentialism of classical and orthodox Marxism. It traces the problem of political hegemony – the problem of winning support beyond a predefined core constituency – through a number of Marxist authors. The argument Laclau and Mouffe make is that Marxism started out as determinist, simplistic and 'essentialist'. Classical Marxists assumed that history evolves through different stages, culminating in revolution by the working class. Laclau and Mouffe suggest that this position was often out of sorts with political conditions in different countries. This led to a series of *ad hoc* modifications which 'supplement' the essentialist account with local variations. Lenin, for instance, had to justify a socialist revolution in a country which had not yet been through a capitalist stage. It was not development through different stages, but a crisis of existing power-structures and an articulation of floating signifiers which led to the Russian Revolution.

Similarly, Gramsci insisted on working-class leadership of revolutionary change, but sought to supplement this leadership with other progressive causes, such as progressive nationalism and peasant resistance. 'Supplementarity' is a Derridean concept having to do with the recurrence of ambiguity in language (see above, 357-64). Laclau and Mouffe apply this Derridean concept to the ways in which Marxist 'essentialism' was undermined by the repetition of Marxism in different contexts. They argue that the radical implications of supplementarity have been held back by the persistence of essentialist ideas in Marxism. Marxism thus suffers the slippage and deferral which Derrida and Bhabha suggest undermine all fixed meanings. It succumbs to ambivalence when it's applied to real social conditions.

For Laclau and Mouffe, people do not form identities as a result of their social class. They form identities as a result of the entire social assemblage of which they are a part. Laclau and Mouffe refer to these assemblages as 'discourses' (a term not limited to texts or speech). People's politics are shaped by the equivalences and antagonisms in which they are situated. People hold a range of identities, known as 'subject-positions'. These subject-positions are more-or-less free-floating. They are not political in themselves. They don't necessarily cluster around particular orientations. And they aren't progressive or reactionary in themselves. They are thus 'floating signifiers'.

This argument involves a sustained attack on orthodox Marxism. In particular, Laclau and Mouffe deny that there is any essential connection between the working-class and progressive politics. They also reject the Marxist approach of interpreting different social issues through a class lens. Class is one signifier among others. People are interpellated into lots of different identities. However, according to Laclau and Mouffe, a life lived through floating signifiers is unsatisfactory and disorderly. People feel a need for some kind of order. Signifiers only gain meaning from their position in relation to other signifiers in a discourse. To prevent them from floating around too much, signifiers need to be pinned in place. But there is no signifier which has meaning of its own and gives meaning to the other signifiers. It is possible for a signifier to take on this role, but this is always a contingent process.

The role of politics is to create a sense of order by binding together, or 'suturing', different floating signifiers. The way this is done is by using an 'empty signifier', a signifier which is largely devoid of meaning of its own. Different floating signifiers can see their own aspirations and needs in this single signifier because of its lack of meaning. The empty signifier thus serves as a trunk, a master-signifier, which pins down the floating signifiers and gives them a sense of meaning. For example, a populist like the Argentinean strongman Juan Perón uses the same slogans with workers and capitalists. But he gives the slogans different meanings, depending which class he is talking to. An empty signifier is generally an abstract term such as "freedom", "democracy", or "the people". The process of attaching floating signifiers to an empty signifier so as to build political power is known as 'hegemony' – a word taken from Gramsci (although it has a rather different meaning in Gramsci's work). In Laclau and Mouffe's sense, a particular hegemony arranges signifiers in particular ways, through two patterns: equivalence and antagonism. Equivalence establishes different signifiers as "counting" as different varieties of the empty signifier. For example, different regions of a country might have their own local governments, and different economic sectors might have different government departments. A farmer, a teacher and a miner might be "equivalent" as contributors to the national economy, or as citizens, even though their activities and social positions are different. Antagonism pits some signifiers against others in exclusionary binaries. It usually happens when some signifiers seem to threaten others. For example, "the nation" might be seen as threatened by immigrants, or "the people" might be pitted against the elite. There is no way to predict which signifiers will come into conflict, or which signifiers will hegemonise others. Class, like other signifiers, has meaning only through its articulation. Classes do not have inherent interests. Their self-perceived interests are effects of the discourse they are articulated in.

Laclau and Mouffe call for a politics of 'radical democracy'. This is a type of democracy which focuses on the process of building hegemony. It maintains that identities have no meaning in themselves, until they are sutured by a hegemonic signifier. The hegemonic, or 'political', gesture is necessary for 'the social', or social life, to exist. Radical democracy is a variant of rainbow alliance politics: a progressive leader or party uses empty signifiers to bring together a range of different subject-positions or identity-groups. Progressive politics should seek to bring in a range of different positions in a situation of pluralism. Their competing claims should be managed through 'agonism' (friendly competition) and the democratic process. After writing *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, Laclau and Mouffe take the theory in different directions. Laclau focuses on the importance of charismatic populist leaders, whereas Mouffe focuses on the role of democratic rules and procedures. Both theorists continued to insist that antagonism is unavoidable, that identities are effects of political hegemony, and that a more-or-less authoritarian politics is necessary. Followers such as Yannis Stavrakakis, Aletta Norval and David Howarth have applied Laclau and Mouffe's theory to interpret a range of social movements, from ecological politics to South African apartheid. However, Laclauians have remained hostile to more radical approaches, particularly those focused on autonomy. They consistently attempt to reduce autonomous social movements back to hierarchical, institutional politics (e.g. Böhm et al., 2010; Harvey and Halverson, 2000). Despite its claims to radicalism, Laclauian politics cares more about order than about freedom or equality. It abandons progress in favour of the production of order through the cybernetic management of floating signifiers.

Laclau and Mouffe propose exactly the kind of politics of identification with a collective 'subject' which Bhabha rejects. In their theory, people come into political coalitions through seeing themselves in an overarching category such as the "people" or the "nation". They also disagree with Bhabha that certain subject-positions are inherently progressive. However, like Bhabha, Laclau and Mouffe believe that no such 'subject' ultimately exists. Political leaders need to construct

the image or structural position of such a 'subject' so as to unite people and produce particular effects. But the image is ultimately contingent. Whereas Bhabha takes the contingency and ultimate non-existence of unified subjects as a basis for continual transgression, Laclau and Mouffe use it to justify the use of empty signifiers and other kinds of rhetorical manipulation to defend an ultimately indefensible, but socially necessary, exercise of power. There are many similarities between Bhabha's theory and Laclau and Mouffe's. These include the language model, the role of supplementation in language and politics, the focus on pragmatism, the belief in the necessity of antagonism, the reduction of individuals to subject-positions, and the ultimate assertion of the necessity of a hierarchical political structure.

In earlier works (Robinson, 2005; Robinson and Tormey, 2009a), I have criticised Laclau and Mouffe's theory of the political constitution of social identities on several grounds. Firstly, their model rests on a dubious theory of constitutive lack – of antagonism as basic to all social life – which is established by fiat. This central concept exhibits many of the same contradictions as Bhabha's hostility to binaries. It does a number of things which are supposedly not permitted in Laclau and Mouffe's theory. Secondly, Laclau and Mouffe's approach exaggerates the importance of institutional politics for everyday life and everyday identities. The state can be brutal, it can be sneaky, but it has limited power in everyday life in capitalist societies. Most often, the state scrambles to adapt to conditions imposed by global capital, social movements, environmental conditions and technological change, all of which are often outside state control. As a simplifying assemblage (Scott, 1998), the state connects to only a few of the "subject-positions" or social

forces in everyday life. Thirdly, Laclau and Mouffe's overvaluation of the role of the state encourages political authoritarianism. The glorification of politics as the site of social integration encourages an arrogant, authoritarian state which exaggerates its own importance and its own power. It thus prefigures the kind of aggressive, top-down attempts at "culture change" which characterised the Blairite period. In reality, this kind of intrusive statism damages social life. People and groups are not simply floating signifiers sitting around waiting for a strongman to come along and arrange them in some kind of order. Desires and identities often do pre-exist social and political movements, even if they are social/discursive constructs on another level. Fourthly, stateless societies exist and have existed throughout history (see Robinson and Tormey, 2010; Barclay, 1982; Clastres, 1994; Gelderloos, 2010a). In fact, most of human history is made up of stateless societies. From a Laclauian point of view, this should be impossible.

Hence, politics always articulates identities, affects, beliefs and language which are largely constituted elsewhere. It is because it affirms, channels or resonates with everyday discourses that a political programme or ideology 'works'. For example, students are 'social constructs', and student identities could not exist separate from the university system (which is a complex discursive assemblage). But student identities may well be prior to the political process of 'representing' them through student unions, mass protests, or anti-fees campaigns. The student subject-position is not primarily constructed through its political articulation. Participation in such political processes might transform students' sense of their own identity – but it might also simply be a continuation of it. On a less formal level, the participants in a revolt against the police are not suddenly turned into opponents of the police through the process of revolt. They may well be newly sensitised to the nature of the police, and they may suddenly realise access to an affective and discursive 'outside' (see Robinson, 2018a; Della Porta, 1995; Peterson, 2001). But, most likely, they have existing grievances against the police or the 'system' which the revolt simply brings together and channels. The grievances may also be social constructs (such as antagonistic encounters with police, or hidden transcripts), but they are still prior to their political expression.

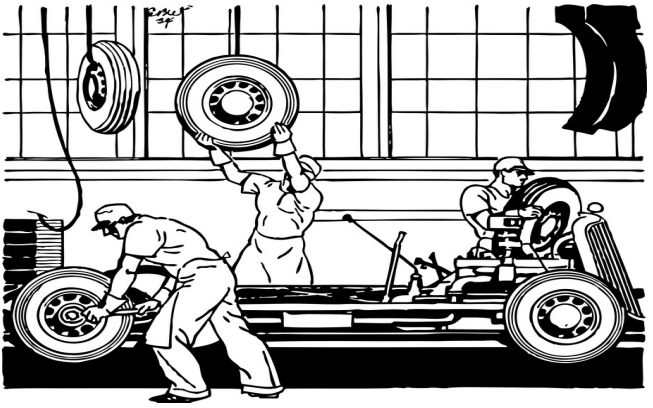
In her critique of Bhabha, Benita Parry notices the parallels between Bhabha and the Eurocommunists, but also a contradiction. *Marxism Today* were economically reductionist, a position Bhabha reviles (Parry, 2004:72). However, Bhabha shares with *Marxism Today* a belief that the changes wrought by neoliberalism since the 1980s are basically progressive. This comes out in Bhabha's work through his faith that neoliberal 'postmodernity' is creating the conditions for emancipation by generating migration, marginality, disjuncture and uncertainty. However, there is a tension in Bhabha's work between this teleological perception and the anti-teleological implications of poststructuralism. From a postcolonial point of view as usually formulated, colonialism is not in any way progressive. Marxist accounts of colonialism building the way for capitalism and thus socialism are rejected as Eurocentric (Saïd, 1978:153-5; Jani, 2002). However, Bhabha seems to rely on colonial sources of suffering for the messianic affects he promotes. This leads to a sense in which Bhabha, like Marx, thinks that colonialism is progressive in spite of itself – it creates its own gravedigger, the postcolonial mimic. If disjuncture is desirable, then logically, colonialism is also desirable – because it is the source of postcolonial disjuncture. Yet it is sharply contradictory that postcolonial theory embeds such as implied assumption that colonialism is progressive.

Neoliberalism

Political writers from the 1980s to the present day have had to engage with changes in the world economy and political structures following the collapse of Fordism. The new regime is sometimes termed neoliberalism, postmodernity, post-Fordism, or globalisation (see Chapter 10). It involves a cluster of changes which seemed to happen together, beginning in earnest in the 1980s. They amount to an epochal transformation in capitalism, with a new organising model. These changes involve a weakening of the earlier

connection between capitalism and the nation-state. Capital has become increasingly transnational, and financial capital has become stronger than productive capital. National economies have been transformed, so as to produce mainly for the global market. States and cities compete for capital investment, rather than redistributing profits. Large parts of the world have been deindustrialised. Industries are now concentrated in China and East Asia. The 'service sector', including financial services, knowledge, information technology, and education, have become predominant in the rich countries.

On the whole, the *Marxism Today* group tended to sympathise with neoliberalism. They viewed it as a progressive transition to a new, higher form of the economy. This new economy was seen as both a force of nature to which people must adapt, and a desirable source of new possibilities. For his part, Bhabha analyses neoliberalism in terms of the world escaping from human control and mapping. We are faced with uncertainty due to our inability to map global networks (LC, 218). This is implicitly taken to be a good thing. Out-of-control economic forces interfere with the fantasy of control by the ego. They create opportunities for ambiguity and ambivalence to be perceived. This process is reinforced by cultural difference. In global cities, both 'knowable community' (everyday, face-to-face community) and 'imaginary community (such as national identity) are altered by migration. This leads to anxiety (LC, 221). Bhabha's view of neoliberalism thus involves a positive appraisal of its force in undermining older, Fordist forms of fixed power. These forms of power are commonly the target of postcolonial and poststructuralist theories, and are implicitly assumed to be still operative. If Bhabha were ever to discuss its origins directly, he might seek to attribute neoliberalism to the effects of ambiguity and subversion. This is roughly the position taken by post-autonomists such as Hardt and Negri, who see neoliberalism as a capture and extension of the resistance movements of the 1970s.



In some respects, this kind of radical critique follows from those of the 1960s/70s. Fordism was in some respects a very rigid system. Ideas and practices which shook things up, or mixed things up – mixed-race relationships, gay relationships, modern art, Situationist tactics, draft evasion, school refusal, underground publications – were pretty subversive. Rebels often had an edge over governments due to their greater flexibility and situational awareness. Overall, however, Bhabha's view is problematic for a number of reasons. Firstly, it glorifies experiences of precarity. As Easthope argues, inhabiting insecure in-between spaces is 'pleasurable only so long as someone else is doing it for you' (Easthope, 1998b:347). There is a world of difference between the self-chosen exodus and variation involved in radical resistance, and the imposed insecurity arising from its recuperation in capitalism (see Shukaitis, 2006). Indeed, Bhabha does not recognise the novelty of neoliberal precarity. He believes that precarity has always characterised the experiences of marginalised groups (ODD, 2). Neoliberalism does not create precarity. It simply makes visible the precarity which already underpinned Fordism.

Secondly, the Fordist view of power is itself rendered obsolete by the very processes Bhabha takes to subvert it. Capitalism and the state still seek control and stability, but they are increasingly comfortable with situations requiring rapid reactions and flexibility. They aren't fixated on the eternal persistence of ossified social forms. Instead, they rely on

high-speed, cybernetic forms of control. For example, a successful neoliberal company constantly innovates, and a successful neoliberal state constantly varies its policies to the economic environment. Today, I would suggest, the fantasy of *human* mapping has been replaced by the fantasy that *computers* can map these networks. This fantasy of cybernetic control has not at all dissolved. Instead, it has been sustained, both by intensified artificial information-processing, and by discrimination among the types of data which 'count'. The tactics which worked against Fordism don't necessarily work against neoliberalism, or against cybernetic control.

There are real similarities between the New Times approach and enthusiasts for neoliberalism such as Kevin Kelly, whose book *Out of Control* (Kelly, 1994) celebrated the rise of the information society. For Kelly, high-speed information flows are producing a kind of hive-mind, which is more intelligent and powerful than any particular human. This involves a general loss of control by human actors, from shop-floor workers to the US President. Humanity should not try to resist this loss of control. Instead, each person must adapt or die. Kelly's cybernetic hive-mind is similar to the overarching language-structure assumed by authors such as Bhabha. The political effects are similar. To be sure, Bhabha's hive-mind is also ambivalent and haunted by lack. This gives it a more pessimistic vibe than Kelly's. Otherwise, they are much alike. They even share an origin in cybernetic models of binary opposition – realised rather differently in structuralist linguistics and modern computer science.

In the views of his supporters, Bhabha's approach disrupts and transgresses, taking people beyond established meanings and categories, into areas of experience he recognises as eerie, uncomfortable, unpredictable, and dangerous. Bhabha expects this to disrupt colonial power and bring about progressive change. Yet this does not seem to be the effect in practice of discomfort and lack of safety. Rather, the loss of a safety-net and of meaning bring out the worst kinds of limbic-system fight-flight responses. The creation of meaning is hard-won, and disposing of it, without building anything in its place, simply

places people in a situation of confusion and suffering. Similarly, when capitalism promoted globalisation in the 1990s, it expected the resultant breakdown of fixed certainties to produce a brave new world of self-production of identities. Instead, it was faced with an upsurge of anxieties and hatreds, culminating in the current regime of securitisation and neoconservatism. This, in turn, has fed into new regimes of rigidity, including new forms of racism. As Bauman argues, capitalism has started using securitisation as the basis of its power, just when it no longer offers a social safety net (Bauman, 2007). As life becomes more precarious (or from Bhabha's perspective, its precariousness becomes more visible), the "clubber" position – restricting rights to supposedly deserving ingroups – is eclipsing the "big tent" position – or the kind of open-ended inclusion Bhabha favours (see McKendrick et al., 2008).

Some comparisons are useful here. Firstly, Stuart Hall – who was part of the *Marxism Today* group – argued that displacement and inbetweenness would have progressive effects. Migration has the effect of 'contesting and dislocating the centred and "closed" identities of a national culture', enabling a free play of differences (1992:309). Migrants have hybrid cultures which transform society through fusion and hybridisation. This is almost identical to Bhabha's position. Hall explicitly connects such processes to 'globalisation', or neoliberalism. However, he also observes that diversity can have a hardening effect. His position seemed to become more pessimistic over time. Similarly, Arjun Appadurai (1990) argues that disjuncture and difference create possibilities in various global 'scapes' such as the 'mediascape'. He was later (2006) to emphasise how the negative effects of globalisation have led to anxiety and reactionary politics. Hence, others with similar views moved away from Bhabha's position.

This supports an interpretation that Bhabha is wrong about the emergence of newness. Simply breaking down fixed categories is not revolutionary. Most often, it produces anxiety (as Bhabha recognises), which feeds into forms of politics seeking to reinforce fixities (a result which he does not recognise). The liminal zone may be necessary for radical change, but it is not sufficient. Breaking down fixed categories is only revolutionary if it is connected to an explosion of desire which creates new values and meanings (even if only on a personal level), and which is thus experienced as joyous life-force rather than as anxiety-provoking precariousness (see Robinson, 2017). But Bhabha's strong constructivism prevents him from articulating any such source of new values. It prevents him from distinguishing the empowering impulse of 1960s radicalism from the non-self-determined insecurity of neoliberalism.

In many ways, Bhabha seems to value the precarity and anxiety caused by neoliberal capitalism. The current conjuncture leads to experiences of 'unhomeliness' and disjuncture. However, this is not a problem from Bhabha's point of view. The point is not to overcome the 'unhomely' world, where nothing fits and everything is precarious. Rather, it is to live in this world, with all its 'ambivalences and ambiguities' (LC, 18). To live in such a world is also a 'profound desire for social solidarity' among ruptured selves (LC, 18). This seems to entail leaving the ruptured condition of precarity intact, because of the spiritual experience it is deemed to offer. The political question of recomposing, networking, or rebuilding harmony amongst multiple experiences and differences is foreclosed as being itself a desire for closure. In one passage, Bhabha quotes at length

from an account of the experience of a Turkish migrant in Germany – an exemplar of 'Marx's reserve army of migrant labour'. The quoted passage recounts alienation without resolution, 'exhausting' overwork, and cultural misunderstandings. It is clear that Bhabha approves of this experience, as a mark of the incompleteness of national identity (LC, 164-5). In another passage, he implicitly criticises Jameson's view that late capitalism causes postmodern fragmentation. He claims, instead, that postmodern fragmentation is an effect of minority resistances which preceded neoliberalism (LC, 173). What Jameson reads as capitalist alienation, Bhabha reads as the progressive collapse of a 'masculinist, heroic ideal' of modernity (LC, 174). For Bhabha, the disjointed subject of postmodernity is not a symptom of capitalist alienation but of progressive resistance to meaning.

However, Bhabha's position seems to lack qualitative, human appeal. There is nothing empowering in itself about being a fragmentary, disjointed subject, or living in a world where nothing makes sense. It seems unlikely, given his fixed ontology and social performance, that Bhabha really lives in such a state of subjective collapse. To be sure, someone adhering to the Bhabha/Derrida style of negative ontology will be able to find sublimity amidst the wasteland. But for the excluded and precarious, this perspective denies the possibility of a better future, except in the most abstract terms. This concedes the terrain of real experiences of trauma to the advocates of repressive reimposition of closure. The hope that anxiety, trauma and disjunction will somehow add up to liberated consciousness seems totally falsified in the post-911 era (see below, 961-4). Instead, radical theory needs to recognise the need to reconnect and recreate a meaningful world, without denying difference.

For Bhabha, the idea of being 'at home' is ultimately an illusion, or at most a contingently constructed aspiration. 'The homeland... is a destination at which you arrive beset by the anxiety and anticipation' arising from contingency. 'An unsettled sense of a "homeland" is not a place of domestic habitation or habituality – no local comforts of home here; no "homeland security" even when you are at home' (ODD, 5). The specific issue Bhabha is addressing in this passage is national identity. However, Bhabha's critique is rooted in general ontological theories about the formation of identity as such (see above, Chapter 2). In this passage, too, Bhabha directly connects the anxiety of not belonging to Heidegger's theory of the *Dasein* – a general, ontological view of the human condition (ODD, 5). People are urged to come to terms with 'the realization of the foreignness that constitutes what is regarded as normative and native: being at home with what is un-homely' (ODD, 7). Since it is rooted in such existential conditions, Bhabha's view applies to *any* possible form of belonging or "homeliness". It is not specifically about whether the nation-state is an appropriate locus for identity. (Indeed, Bhabha specifically does *not* wish to dismantle the nation-state; see below, 895). His criticism also applies to any possible site of belonging, from international socialism to local communes or bands. Bhabha is effectively telling people that they *cannot have* a homely "comfort zone" – whether in a nation-state or any other space or category. He wants people to accept constant "unhomeliness" and anxiety as simply a fact of life.

Interviewer Klaus Stierstorfer challenges Bhabha with the question, 'how much displacement can an individual take, or a group take?' The very question – the sense that there is a limit to human capacities for displacement – challenges Bhabha's ontology. Bhabha answers the question sideways. He suggests that 'home' has two possible meanings: as 'the normalized, the naturalized, the inevitable, the original... the "thereness" of your existence', or as 'what you return to'. He then displaces the question to rational-choice economics. One chooses where to live for economic or strategic reasons – and this is often lost in discourses on cosmopolitanism. Because people make decisions to move 'for certain purposes', based on 'pluses and minuses', the process is not random. '[T]here is a narrative plotting, and it is not just an endless back-and-forth'. The resultant 'forms of narrativity, choices, judgements, which evaluate certain locations', is what 'create[s] a home around certain locations'. These choices are also changeable, and 'there is a constant transvaluation, or a changing'. He adds that 'what is being iterated or articulated around the concept of home are certain needs, certain interests, certain passions and affects, that actually then create that life-world, that existential comfort that you associate with home'. (DH, n.p.). Home, for Bhabha, is not where the heart is. It is where self-interest decides, and the heart necessarily follows. People are, by implication, capable of endless displacement, provided they have narrative agency. And in Bhabha's theory, people *always* have such agency (see above, 206-7). This is not how most people think about home, and it clearly subordinates place to economic rationality. Clearly someone can move for economic reasons, and feel alienated from their new 'home'. Bhabha does not recognise the element of involuntary displacement in migration flows based on economics, possibly because his focus is on elite migrants. He also does not seem concerned that he is elevating economic belonging over spatial and social belonging. In many ways, he articulates a neoliberal view of place – what Tilly (1975) calls a functional rather than a territorial view.

Later in the interview, ideas of global citizenship are criticised as resting on 'permanence', instead of 'the short temporal span of the refugee'. Instead, Bhabha urges the world to move towards a 'global right of hospitality' (DH, n.p.). Hospitality is a Derridean/Levinasian concept, which reflects Bhabha's preferred ethical theories. It is rather different from a right to migrate, since it is conceived as unrealisable (see above, 306). But even if one believes in a right to migrate (which is also tenable from an autonomist, anarchist or Marxist position), it does not imply a *duty* to migrate, or the desirability of a world-system which forces or incentivises people to migrate. Bhabha seems reluctant to recognise a right *not* to migrate, or to recognise that this right is being violated today. In connecting migration to a universal ethic, Bhabha elevates it into a kind of duty, at least at the metaphorical level of abandoning rooted meanings. In this case, he speaks of refugees, and not elite migrants. Refugees do not, of course, generally move for reasons of choice. Yet nonetheless, they are taken to embody a desirable 'temporality'. It is very clear that Bhabha does not simply recognise contingency and temporariness. He believes they are in some sense morally necessary, to actualise Levinasian ethics.

There are other ways in which Bhabha, somewhat meekly, criticises neoliberalism. For example, he admits that the 'former colonies' are still 'dominated' by the former colonisers, the IMF and the WTO. However, he emphasises that they have also been able to follow their own path. And he suggests they are also exploited by internal elites (MGM, 170).

Globalisation, he adds, is nothing particularly new. There were just as many communication and technological advances in the age of colonialism as there are today (MGM, 141). This rather ambiguous passage juxtaposes various claims in a way which disguises the particular form of neoliberal power. Firstly, neoliberal power is equated with older colonial domination. This allows continual rhetorical attacks on older power-structures. Secondly, internal domination in Southern countries is also recognised. This recognition does not lead to any questioning of the politics of positionality. Instead, it is a way of emphasising agency even in the face of oppression. It thus reinforces the standard Levinasian responsibilisation which is a recurring part of Bhabha's account (see above, 206).

Later, Bhabha criticises the idea of globalisation because of its discursive effects. The concept encourages people to just describe the features of the world over and over (MGM, 172). The concept is too big. There's a lack of something bigger to measure it with (MGM, 176). Instead, Bhabha focuses on minority action. This is meant to expose the complexities and discontinuities of the global sphere (MGM, 172). Minoritisation is not counterposed to globalisation. It is an intervention in globalisation (MGM, 175). And it provides something like a way to measure globalisation against another criterion (MGM, 176). It is progressive in that it brings chance and contingency into national and democratic spaces. It creates a situation where mediation, rather than repetition of 'individualism, tolerance, etc', is necessary (MGM, 176). Hence, Bhabha situates his own

type of politics *within* neoliberal globalisation, yet also as disruptive of it. Later in the interview, the implications become even clearer. 'It is very easy to always blame the market and transnational corporations'. Instead, Bhabha suggests, one should emphasise investments in education and literacy (MGM, 178). This is a standard Third Way position, in which global problems result from a lack of education rather than socioeconomic oppression. Bhabha is also committed to a kind of ethical supplementation of neoliberalism which is standard to Third Way politics. In another piece, Bhabha criticises the 'global/local' dichotomy as too polarising and as creating 'a univocal choice that is never free' (PN3, 80). In still another, he opposes approaches which dismantle national certainties only to replace them with global-scale 'overarching constructs' (ODD, 4). He is concerned that 'global vocabularies of mobility and contingency' are losing their 'critical edge' and have become 'victims of their own curricular success' (ODD, 5). The 'meta-critical' scale of globalisation theory undermines awareness of the 'complexity' of local contingency, including the disjunctive and disruptive aspects Bhabha values (ODD, 5).

Elsewhere, Bhabha lays out a pro-"globalisation" position. We should not, he says, be 'Luddites and fail to see what is opening up before us – a world of more complex boundaries, where we are forced to stretch our social and historical imaginations beyond what we can readily visualise or experience'. This is 'a global leap – a leap in technology [and] human faith' (CA, 45). This statement portrays the *forced* stretching imposed by neoliberalism as primarily positive, and suggests few qualms about its coercive nature. It also derides those who do not wish to be 'forced' into such a world as 'Luddites'. Yet Bhabha emphasises that inequalities persist. We are not really in a 'global village'. The 'global world' is full of 'anxious apprehensions'. People are constantly 'thrown back' onto the national scale. This is why it is important to remember colonialism as an earlier variety of globalisation. People from the global North should not be allowed to pretend that we're all part of one big global festival. Instead, Bhabha seeks to promote ideas of lack, and abandoning the 'dream of the world made whole' (CA, 45). A complicity between neoliberalism and lackist theory is here apparent. Lackism is necessary so as to adapt to

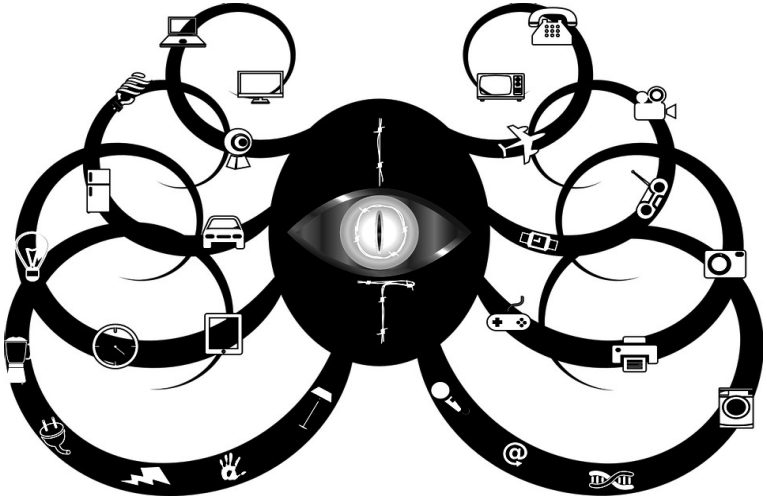
globalisation, and globalisation is progressive because it forces people to adopt lackism. Indeed, Bhabha almost seems to posit lackism as a necessary supplement, to make globalisation "work" – repeating the standard Third Way or post-Washington Consensus move of adding ethical and educational supplements. Capitalist alienation causes, or is supplemented by, ontological alienation.

Another passage reads almost like the celebrations of neoliberal capitalism as an open network in the work of Castells (1996), Kelly (1994), and Ohmae (1990). Bhabha writes of 'disproportionate convergences' arising from increased circulation and speed. These convergences 'generate an energy of interdisciplinary circulation' in academic spaces. 'Instead of the binary logic of comparison and connection, we now have a logic of convergence launched by a kinetic burst of energy that, metaphorically, has a certain ballistic tendency' (ODD, 8). 'Ballistic' here means both energetic and antagonistic. The metaphor of ballistic energy contradicts Bhabha's more usual focus on disruption and jamming. This suggests that he is mainly interested in disrupting *Fordist* structures and categories, rather than neoliberal flows. More importantly, he once again traces progressive consequences to neoliberal global processes of speed-up and time-space compression. He does not consider the possibility that these new forms of high-speed, imperative connection are actually part of a new system of global cybernetic power. Bhabha seeks to use this new type of power strategically. 'The aim of convergence... is not to establish comparisons... but to measure the surface tension, spatial and temporal, to decipher new, revisionary forms of agency' (ODD, 9). The point is not to analyse and understand. The point is to exploit surface-level flows to obtain power. Unlike Castells, Kelly and Ohmae, however, Bhabha does not value circulation in itself. He seeks to use it strategically. Circulation aids disruption of fixed categories, but the crucial question is who speaks and from what position (ODD, 11).

In a crucial difference from contemporary identity politics, Bhabha insists on the importance of alliances in the older sense of connections across difference. 'It seems to me that if you say, "Only those who have suffered, or who have been oppressed, can speak for the oppressed", it cuts out the possibility of building a larger coalition of people and structures that can speak for liberty or the common good' (RCA, 25). Bhabha wishes to keep his variant of positionality politics tied closely to inter-group alliances and universal-scale institutional projects. He sees the return to stronger identities as an effect of a shifting context. Anti-essentialism seemed important in the 1990s. Bhabha insists it is still 'right'. But the current 'ferocious erasure of the lives, experiences, and histories of the marginalized, the oppressed, of minorities' creates an 'understandable desire to hold onto something that is your "own"' (RCA, 26). This is rather different from how Bhabha treats other symptoms of precarity, particularly the similar security-seeking impulses of white working-class people.

Neoliberalism has in fact been imposed as a global model. Does this mean that the New Times theory (and its capitalistic equivalent) is right? This is one way of interpreting the success of neoliberalism. It might also be the case that political forces successfully *imposed* the model and punished those who resisted it. The socio-economic world is not an outer reality to which people merely adapt. It is an effect of political choices. This is the argument of scholars like Panitch and Gindin (2004), Harvey (2003) and Wade (2008). According to these scholars, there was a successful 'regime change' in the 1980s which has never been reversed. Neoliberalism and 'globalisation' are themselves contingent, not necessary. They were imposed by the US, or transnational capital, using temporary, contingent advantages. Neoliberalism then it reproduced itself by creating conditions which sustained it, but it is now reaching its limits. The narrative that the process is

inevitable, that 'times' are simply 'new', is itself part of the propaganda offensive to promote the new, politically constructed order. It might even be the case that people with conscious or unconscious investments in the success of the neoliberal project successfully convinced themselves and others that the process is inevitable, that (in Thatcher's words) 'there is no alternative'.



It is possible that what is decisive in politics is not government power, but social power and the technological and social opportunity structure. Capitalist elites and states were able to impose neoliberalism in the 1980s because the balance of power at this point favoured them. For example, they could use the flight of capital to evade national-scale resistance. But the balance of power keeps shifting, and the point of radical theory is not to reflect these shifts, but to influence them for the better. Belief-systems and forms of organisation themselves alter the balance of power. If people come to believe that neoliberalism is an outer reality to which they have to adapt, this in fact strengthens neoliberalism and becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Instead, it is important to look for ways to resist neoliberalism, including its prevalent affects of anxiety and collapse.

In the Margins: Kondratiev Wave Theory and Neoliberalism

Kondratiev wave theory is a theory of economic change within capitalism. It is often used within world systems analysis. According to Kondratiev wave theory, capitalism goes through recurring cycles of growth and decline. At the beginning of a growth cycle, capitalism discovers a new organising model. This usually involves a new fuel source, a new hegemonic centre of production, a new way of organising the productive process, an upscaling of production networks, and so on. This wave fuels growth and expansion until it reaches its limits. When it reaches its limits, there is a crisis, followed by a downturn. The downturn has some of the features of the upturn, but rests on increasingly intense exploitation using aspects of the existing model. Eventually this phase reaches its own limits and capitalism needs to find a new organising model once more, so as to survive and grow again.

There are different versions of the theory which posit different causes of the cycles and different dates for each wave. World systems analysts using the theory, such as Arrighi and Silver (1999), also connect it to shifts in geopolitical hegemony. Autonomist Marxists also connect it to waves of struggle which disrupt existing organisational models and force system-change (Negri, 1998, 2005). There appears to have been a downturn in the early twentieth century. Fordism emerged as the new organising model, using oil as its power source and with America as the rising hegemon. At its height, it diffused factory-line technologies and mass consumer goods. This period lasted until the 1970s, which witnessed crises of Fordism, oil, and American global power. Neoliberalism is the subsequent downturn phase, in which productive growth has slowed, social inequality has increased, and circulation of capital is more important than production. It still depends on the same technologies and social forms as Fordism. But it is based on squeezing more and more profit out of existing systems. Depending on the length of waves, neoliberalism is approaching a crisis point some time between now and 2025

(some commentators believed at the time that the 2008 financial crash was the turning point to a new phase). After this point, capitalism will either find a new organising model or collapse.

Kondratiev wave theory has various implications relevant to Bhabha's work. Firstly, if the theory is right, then neoliberalism was indeed 'New Times' in a certain sense. There are economic reasons why Fordist politics stopped working at a certain point. However, it was a new phase within capitalism itself, and not a revolutionary change in social organisation. The times are new in some ways, but not in others. Secondly, these 'New Times' are not here to stay. We are due another transition to a new phase in the near future. If capitalism survives, then the next phase will be an upturn phase, and its politics may well look more like Fordism than neoliberalism. If it does not survive, then we should expect a Dark Age on the model proposed by Sing Chew (2006): economic and demographic decline, dispersal of power, ruralisation, and decentring of knowledge. Dark Ages 'occur as a consequence of ecological exhaustion and stress and exhibit losses in wealth, trade disruptions, and simplification of lifestyles and less hierarchization and more egalitarianism of the social structure' (Chew, 2006:160). Thirdly, geopolitical hegemony tends to shift between different countries along with Kondratiev waves. It is conceivable that China, India, or even a coalition of post-national global cities or a decentred virtual capitalist class could be the hegemon in the next stage – rather than the old imperial centres. This would lead to considerable problems for postcolonial theory. The project of breaking down "modern reason", associated with the power of the west, would lose its appeal if the locus of capitalism shifted outside its historic core. There is even a possible scenario where postcolonial theory acts as the nursemaid for a cybernetic neo-Confucian recomposition of capitalism.

Another aspect of the project to which Bhabha is loosely affiliated is a kind of deliberate forgetting. There is a certain prejudice in 'New Times' and Third Way rhetoric against 'old' theories. This may reflect an attempt to forget history in a rush for innovation for its own sake. It is tied-in with the "no alternative" dictum, as well as with the politics of perversion (see above, 386-91). It is not clear that 'old' ideas have been marginalised because they are now less relevant. Certain Marxist claims – about the global growth of the industrial working-class as a proportion of the world population, for example – are hard to defend today. But others are actually more defensible today than during the Fordist period. For example, there is now wealth polarisation and pauperisation of the working-class again. This was not so clearly the case in the Fordist era. In the 1970s, Marxists had to dig under layers of ideology, or force their evidence, to maintain that most social institutions exist to serve capital. These days it's explicit. Schools, universities, governments, welfare regimes, psychology are *meant* to serve 'the economy'! Similarly, psychoanalytic accounts are disturbingly accurate in relation to phenomena such as nationalism. Today's alt-right is in many ways a re-run of the processes described by Theweleit (1987/1980). The current fad for behaviourist and cybernetic explanations based on incentives, enablement, and opportunity-structures is far less convincing.

Perhaps it is repressive 'presentism', rather than anachronism, which is to be feared (c.f. Rushkoff, 2004). Neoliberalism is a radically superficial, radically present-focused system. It involves the ideological hegemony of surface-level, mechanistic and cybernetic ideologies, with older, more 'humanised', complex, or depth-focused approaches deemed out-of-date, falsified, or even oppressive. Cognitive behaviourism replaces psychoanalysis. Human resource management – mostly neo-Taylorist or McDonaldised – replaces industrial relations. Policy-relevant research, most of it positivist, replaces critical sociology. Radical criminology is sidelined by Situational Crime Prevention and computerised policing. The Nietzschean and Freudian idea of morality as sublimated sadism is replaced by neo-functionalist social capital approaches. Even within radical theory, cybernetic and behaviourist models of habitual behaviour and preconscious belief

have overridden older Marxist, Freudian, Nietzschean, and existentialist perspectives. There is a kind of *forced forgetting* – what postcolonial theorists call a sanctioned ignorance – of a series of earlier perspectives.

Neoliberalism's wilful 'forgetting' of earlier approaches is what Deleuze and Guattari (1987) call a 'subtraction of axioms'. It simply discounts and ignores a range of phenomena which it is inconvenient to recognise. As Guattari argues, it restricts what 'counts' as existing or having importance (1996:137). What exists is what can be mapped; invisible, depth phenomena are discounted. Žižek (2001) talks about a *denkverbot* – an order not to think – which prohibits the use of certain kinds of radicalism. Wilson (1998) argues that capitalism has suppressed the major discoveries of the last two centuries: the theories of Freud, Marx and Nietzsche. It has returned to the nineteenth century and caught us up in an endless re-run of its own history. With the loss of Marx, reality is folded into a single perspective, the perspective of capital. With the loss of Freud, complex unconscious processes are denied, and people are reduced to stereotypical 'rational subjects'. But where does Bhabha's poststructuralism fit in? On the one hand, he collaborates in the overwriting of 'old' theories, and particularly the suppression of Marxism. On the other, he continues to use concepts drawn from psychoanalysis and phenomenology. However, he tends to flatten, decontextualise, and deradicalise these concepts. He renders them compatible with cybernetic capitalism.

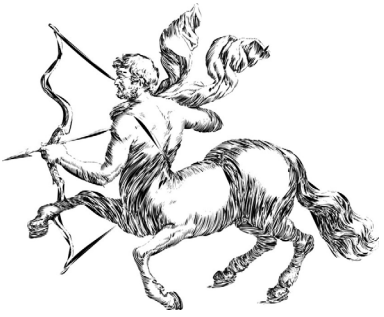
In a sense, the neoliberal approach, and Bhabha along with it, is haunted by its own ambiguity. The New Times theory and the *Marxism Today* group served as the nursemaids of a process of accommodation of the left to neoliberalism, and the corresponding denial of 'old' ideas. Bhabha, with his strangely timeless approach to historical events, is also part of this tendency. Yet this presentism continues to be haunted by a time-lag, by the persistence of the 'old' world which were meant to have died. If 'old' politics has really been superseded, then why has it 'returned' today, in the rise of 1930s-style far-right fascism/populism *and* the revival of state socialism? Why are people rejecting the hallmarks of the 'new economy' – such as the European Union – on a massive scale? Why are the "rustbelt" areas, which were emptied of economic life in the transition from Fordism to neoliberalism, often at the heart of these processes? In the years of neoliberal hubris in which Bhabha's major works were written, neoliberals declared the end of history. Yet, history seems to have restarted. This seems to fit a Kondratiev wave model better than a 'New Times' model.

Furthermore, the naturalisation of neoliberalism as 'globalisation' has devastating social effects. The political belief that people must adapt to the new economy or die has disastrous effects. It leads in practice to a callous neglect, or even proactive dispossession and repression, of those who can't or won't adapt. In manifests in social practices known as 'democide' – such as arbitrarily cutting off people's benefits or services, rendering certain groups (such as refugees) destitute, or causing levels of stress which lead to mental collapse and suicide. On a global level, it leads to forced delinking of swathes of the planet deemed unprofitable for global capital. And people's attempts to solve their own problems, for example through squatting and land occupations, are often viciously repressed. These effects could easily be prevented, but doing so is deemed either impossible given the nature of the new economy, or undesirable because it incentivises and 'enables' refusal to adapt. For example, it is argued in all seriousness that starving people should not be given food aid because they might become 'aid-dependent', and not economically productive. Such democide is not simply an effect of colonialism. It is the

human cost of the very precarity and anxiety which Bhabha values as sources of progress. Is he, then, accepting neoliberalism's barbarity on the same grounds that earlier leftists condoned Stalinist forced industrialisation and the resultant famines and killings? Is he making the same mistake that other postcolonial theorists denounce in Marx's analyses of colonialism?

There is also a political economy of cultural studies itself. Postcolonial theory emerged mainly within cultural studies. Cultural studies began as the study of subcultures, and was populated mainly by radical academics, including those of the New Times group. Only later – when the "creative economy" began to capture and recuperate aspects of subcultures – did it become tied to the new economy. This leads to a kind of recuperation. As McRobbie (2012:9) suggests, 'the unexpected outcome of cultural studies is to have found itself canonized as a curriculum for a new creative economy'. Cultural studies and related courses (media studies, literature, and so on) often in practice end up training the next generation of professionals in the "creative economy". Artists similarly become 'reconciled to the demands of the job' in a neoliberal context, accepting the duty to self-promote and entrepreneurial ideas (McRobbie, 2012:83). People trained in ideas like Bhabha's often go on to become the meaning-setters and emotional manipulators of the worlds of art, advertising, design, marketing, journalism, and television. This unusual path of recuperation is facilitated by the ambivalent inside/outside position taken by authors such as Bhabha.

Bhabha's account of hybridity is relevant in unexpected ways. There *are* mimic-men in neoliberalism. First off, there are the Southern elites and middle-classes who attempt to become part of a global consumer culture. These groups are often the local allies and enforcers of global colonial power. Secondly, there are the governments and social movements which pursue what Mignolo (2011) calls a 'dewesternisation' agenda. They accept neoliberalism and modernity, but seek to displace the west and become the central power themselves, by moving up the global hierarchy. Chinese and Indian state development practices, and the discourse of the African Renaissance are examples of this approach. Thirdly, there are people who accept consumer culture or the neoliberal ideal of the rational individual, but give it different, local inflections. Gang culture is in some respects similar to consumer culture. It sometimes involves themes such as a rugged individualist struggle to survive and to accumulate status goods as marks of social value. In parts of Africa, neoliberalism is reinflected in discourses of moral collapse. Social effects of neoliberalism are blamed on the moral degeneracy of the younger generations, and women in particular (Radhakrishnan and Solari, 2015; Cornwall, 2002; Dilger, 2003). All of these processes reflect Bhabha's theories as if in a hall of mirrors. Gangs, dewesternisers, and 'neo-patrimonial' elites are 'not quite' neoliberal rational subjects. They reflect the impacts of neoliberalism when it is 'supplemented' by local contexts, and subverted from the inside. But of course, none of them are the reflexive postcolonial subjects Bhabha wants. They give him his message back, in an incommensurable form. The slippage of signifiers ultimately defeats the master hybridiser himself!



The most politically interesting responses to neoliberalism, however, do not come from such mimicry. They come from movements like the Zapatistas, the anti-capitalist movement, the *Argentinazo*, the Greek revolt of 2008, the Arab Spring, and the various mass protests of 2011-13. They also include attempts to build other kinds of societies in everyday life, and theories about these practices – for instance, the social centres movement, the subsistence perspective, eco-anarchism, and the autonomy of migration perspective. These are perspectives based on radical refusal. The conservative effects of mimicry are predictable, given that neoliberalism maintains that there is no alternative. Bhabha's strategy reproduces these effects by denying the autonomy of the 'hidden transcript' and refusing antagonistic political gestures. It is precisely when neoliberalism is recognised as *not all there is* – when the all-embracing holism of a world with 'no alternative' and 'no outside' ceases to frame thought and action – that radical politics becomes possible today.

Situating Bhabha: Anglo-poststructuralism, the unmade working-class and the excluded

It is also instructive to examine Bhabha in relation to the emergence of a certain variety of poststructuralism in the English-speaking world. Postcolonial theorists such as Bhabha and Spivak can be loosely grouped with Anglo-American poststructuralisms, such as the Anglo-Foucauldians, the Yale Deconstructionists, the Essex School of discourse analysis, most post-anarchists, and most academic readers of Deleuze, in performing a similar

reading of the poststructuralist tradition. This reading arises mainly in the English-speaking world, and reflects a delay in the reception of French texts from the 1960s-70s. It occurs at a time when neoliberalism is ascendant, especially in Britain and America. It is often articulated mainly in antagonism with Marxism, rather than with Fordist capitalism. In general, this reading neglects or latently accepts neoliberalism, involves radical terminology without substantive political commitment, displays a strong aversion to binaries which does as much to foreclose as enable thought, and adopts a philosophical style in which the always-ambivalent or always-lacking nature of life itself prohibits systemic-level critique, rendering neoliberalism bearable (often through the quasi-mystical sublimation of suffering inherited from Derrida). It typically merges Foucault, Lacan, Deleuze, Derrida, Lyotard, and Baudrillard into a single, synthesised perspective. This Anglo-poststructuralist synthesis is purged of many of the more eclectic and challenging aspects of each theorist. Many (but not all) of the people using Anglo-poststructuralism are also interested in one or more structural oppression, such as race, gender or sexuality. Bhabha is very much inside this Anglo-poststructuralist theoretical field.

Anglo-poststructuralism is a very particular, and often distorted, way of reading the original texts of poststructuralism. These texts arose in a context of anti-state and anti-capitalist revolt. The fact of selective re-reading is not itself particularly unusual. Texts are usually re-read to make them relevant to new contexts. Yet the widespread and largely unquestioned nature of this particular "productive misreading" is revealing. While I'm hesitant to reduce belief-systems to social positionalities, I believe there are social conditions for the emergence of this particular way of making poststructuralism "relevant". Given its pervasiveness among radical academics, I suspect this style of poststructuralism reflects the 'class interests' so to speak of included or semi-included academics working inside neoliberalism. It articulates the dual aspects of their position – their adverse incorporation in a system they feel is inescapable, their significant but muted desire for some kind of oppositional politics (including resistance to the imperative to be communicable), and their use of theoretical production as a supplement to submersion in

dominant institutions, and sometimes even as a mystical source of redemption which sustains their productivity. It is a useful philosophy for sustaining a dual, marginal consciousness within dominant institutions. It is thus a way of making poststructuralism relevant *for them* – and not necessarily for anyone else.

In my view, Bhabha's critique of essentialism is not so much wrong as overplayed. The tone of melancholic acceptance of lack, the acceptance of precarity and the loss of meaning as simply a fact of life, is only one of various directions in which the rejection of strong binaries can be taken. Of course, advocates of Anglo-poststructuralism tend to want their readers to see their alternative as the only option. But it is not. For example, post-left anarchy draws heavily on poststructuralism without rejecting antagonism. There are a few similarities between Bhabha's work and post-left anarchy, especially in their critiques of leftism, but their political positions are very different. In particular, post-left anarchy is vocally anti-systemic. The point from which one resists may be fragmentary and

decentralised, but the adversary most certainly is not, and the opposition between system and resister still plays an important role. There is little sublimation of negative affects in post-left anarchy, but rather, projectile anger and joyous affirmation. The spirit of post-left anarchy is in some respects closer to the spirit of Paris 1968 and of the early poststructuralists than the current poststructuralist valorisation of anxiety and melancholy. There have also been productive cross-readings of poststructuralism with post-autonomist Marxism (e.g. Holmes, 2001; Gulli, 2005). It should also be emphasised that there are other ways in which the poststructuralist heritage can be used. I often use Deleuze and Guattari in my own work (e.g. Robinson, 2010; Karatzogianni and Robinson, 2009), but I read them through autonomism and the politics of desire. It is equally possible to use Foucault, Baudrillard, Lacan, and Derrida outside their Anglophone standardisation.

For the same reasons that Anglo-poststructuralism is useful for a particular socially-included group, its appeal to marginal groups is limited. It has little to offer to the 'surplus population' marginalised by neoliberalism, the declining post-working-class in deindustrialising cities, or the precarious workers on the bottom rungs of the new economy. For the surplus population, it counsels a hybrid inclusion they can never achieve. For the post-working-class, it counsels celebration of disjunctions which have destroyed their social world. For precarious workers, it offers glorification of the new economy and their own psychological suffering. There has never been a political articulation of the sublimation of suffering counselled by Bhabha. While there is some overlap between theories like Bhabha's and current forms of feminism, anti-racism, grassroots Queer politics, and other identity-based movements (probably because academic theories influence student activism), social movement positions tend to be more antagonistic and binarising than their academic relatives. They copy some of Bhabha's bad habits, but in other ways are more akin to Fanon or Ignatiev (see below, 861-885). Authors like Bhabha have thus contributed much to the style and rhetoric of identity-based social movements, but have failed to contain their tendencies to polarisation.

Bhabha depicts a world in which the disjuncture and ambivalence of the new economy affect everyone equally (with the exception that migrants and subaltern groups are particularly affected). Yet neoliberalism is fundamentally a restructuring of production, and its impact is highly differentiated. The capitalist 'unmaking and remaking' of the working-class recurs at every Kondratiev wave transition. And the 'unmade' working-class (see Karatasli et al., 2015) is completely absent from Bhabha's account. This is notable, for instance, in his misreading of *Fish Story* (see above, 187-8). Absent from most of contemporary theory, this class has drifted in reactionary directions. For example, the French geographer Gulluy (2014) writes of a French internal periphery of rural and small-town areas which have been impoverished and marginalised in the new economy. In some ways, the people of the internal periphery are even more marginal to the new economy than the immigrant and minority populations of the urban suburbs (*banlieues*). The suburban populations are notoriously victimised by police, racists and institutional discrimination, but they often have (badly-paid, hyperexploited) jobs in the new economy. The unmade working-class do not have a place in this brave new world. But they have not ceased to exist. Their impact is disruptive – if often reactionary.

Similar claims have been made about working-class Trump voters in America (Rosenberg and Boyle, 2019). Most rural areas and small towns, and some of the large deindustrialised cities of the 'rustbelt', voted for Trump. In China, a parallel phenomenon takes more left-

wing forms. Chinese neoliberal development has focused on a handful of large, export-oriented cities on the south coast. The 'rustbelt' – the old industrial cities of northeastern China – has been neglected and run-down in the same way as similar areas in America, Britain and France. As a result, workers articulate a nostalgic Maoist discourse focused on former entitlements (Lee, 2007). In Bulgaria, which has seen mass emigration under European Union free movement rules, a split has emerged between aspirational migrants and those unable to migrate. The latter have become resentful of the former, fuelling nationalism (Genova, 2017). Similar patterns can be observed in northern England, eastern Germany, Russia, and elsewhere.

In addition to the unmade working class, there is also a large and growing 'surplus population', or excluded class, of people who have never been included in the system (Clover, 2016; Karatasli et al., 2015). Neoliberalism was meant to usher in a brave new world of market-led growth. Once the pains of the transition were over, people would allocate their labour more efficiently. This would lead to jobs and enrichment all around. From a New Times perspective, one might expect to see the huge numbers of lost industrial jobs replaced by flexible work in the service sector. In practice, however, neoliberalism has destroyed more jobs than it has created. It has also undermined other sources of income and welfare, such as subsistence farming, state-provided welfare and local communities. The excluded struggle to survive mainly in the shanty-towns and peripheral settlements of today's cities. They are discontented and 'restive'. They usually have their own social networks, but they are alienated from the dominant political and economic systems. They are a major constituency in the mass protests, 'riots' and occupations which periodically recur today. The excluded stratum's politics are those of gangs, small-world networks, autonomous social movements and their reactionary cousins, explosive revolts around lightning-rod events, and antagonism with ruling elites. Both the unmade working-class and the excluded class have little in common with Bhabha's idea of subaltern people surviving by mimicking and internally subverting the claims of the dominant system.

There is thus a sense in which Bhabha paradoxically repeats the violence of colonialism. In practice, neoliberalism – and especially the Third Way – acts as if the other worlds no longer exist. Neither the 'old' world of Fordism nor the 'other worlds' of radical politics have any importance or bearing. The hubris of neoliberalism, its 'progressive' celebration of disjuncture and difference, is meant to be the end of history. Yet, in a manner reminiscent of Bhabha's concept of the 'time-lag', these 'worlds' continue to exist. They are treated as if they don't exist and don't matter by political governments, companies, and academics. But people continue to live their lives at least partially in these worlds, particularly when they cannot gain access to new-economy jobs and/or neoliberal consumer culture. The discontent of the excluded class and the unmade working-class reflect social processes which capitalism and academia knew about until the 1980s, and then wilfully forgot. Capitalism decided it could make do with the assumption of conscious rational subjects and market distribution of resources. It could do without making social-democratic concessions to other kinds of social reality. The current situation of malaise and denial is a product of this wilful forgetting of other realities. These realities are not part of the cybernetic model of neoliberal reality, yet they continue to haunt it. They are Bhabha's time-lag.

CHAPTER 13

Bhabha and Political Theory 1:
Liberalism and Communitarianism

Bhabha's work, and postcolonial theory more broadly, have had a range of labels attached to them. Right-wing critics term them radical or even crypto-Marxist – similar to orthodox Marxists. Marxist critics refer to them as liberal, or as "identity politics". In their own terms, postcolonial theorists are transgressive, materialist, and radical – but certainly not authoritarian. The ambiguity of Bhabha's categories and the obscurity of his style lend themselves to such diverse perceptions. As we have seen, he often combines aspects of radical rhetoric with reformist positions. His goals - such as the destruction of colonial power - are in some ways extremely radical. And there are echoes of socialism in his work. He seeks a 'socialist society'; he is politically 'committed', though not to any specific cause (LC, 21). He occasionally supports traditional socialist causes. For example, he apparently supported the Miners' Strike as a struggle of the worse-off (LC, 346). This socialist aspect of Bhabha's heritage, combined with his identity politics and his strident rhetorical "radicalism", is what most offends conservative critics.

On the other hand, the means to achieve these ends are mostly pretty inoffensive from the point of view of the powerful. Bhabha's main proposed methods are cultural critique, the production of theory, narration of experiences, reinflections of legal and political terms, and small reforms compatible with neoliberal capitalism. And some aspects of neoliberalism and alienation are taken for granted and put beyond critique. This, as well as the neglect of class struggle and antagonistic politics, is what annoys radical critics. Bhabha thus ends up in a position where he is too radical for the liberals and conservatives, but too liberal and conservative for the radicals. How, then, does Bhabha relate to the various political positions adjacent to his own?

Liberalism

Although frequently labelled as such by Marxists, Bhabha is not in any simple sense a 'liberal'. In critical theory, 'liberal' is sometimes given a special meaning. This ontological sense of the word 'liberal' also appears in the work of authors like Althusser and Žižek. It leads to a labelling of any perspective which maintains that individuals or other pre-social or extra-social units have agency or ontological status as 'liberal' and as continuous with dominant views. In particular, someone who believes that individuals really exist, prior to society, is a 'liberal'. So, in some cases, are people who believe in a personal unconscious, collective agency, pre-personal flows of desire, and so on. Hence, radical theories are taken to contain a 'liberal' residue, in spite of their political opposition to liberalism (e.g. TT, 116).

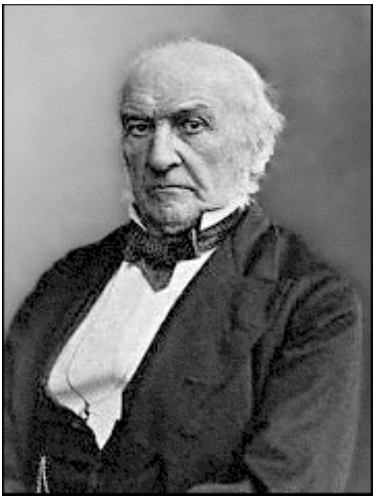
This is rather misleading, particularly since 'liberal' is usually a snarl-word in critical theory (see below, 823-5). Many people who believe that individuals exist in some sense are not political liberals. They can be conservatives, anarchists, even Marxists. On the other hand, people who don't believe in atomised individuals (such as Paul Patton, Kevin Kelly, Chantal Mouffe, and Richard Rorty) can also be political liberals. And they can hold conservative or far-right positions which are politically much worse than liberalism (e.g. Martin Heidegger, or Nick Land). Indeed, it is questionable today whether neoliberalism *does* rely on a view of people as autonomous agents rather than as cybernetic nodes (Invisible Committee, 2015). So why refer to anyone who holds a belief in individual subjectivity as 'liberal'? The main point in redefining liberalism in this way seems to be to head-off debate about issues like co-constitutivity. It draws a connection between any position which denies strong constructivism and the political status quo.

Bhabha is neither a 'liberal' in the ontological snarl-word sense, nor a political liberal. He does not believe that people are atomised individuals, that people have natural rights, that political equality trumps economic power, that the democratic state is the end-point of history, or that free public deliberation is the best way to conduct politics. His thought shows traces of both libertarian and authoritarian critiques of liberalism, as well as elements indicative of a socialist heritage. However, Bhabha's insistence on mimicry, hybridity and co-constitutivity pull him away from radical politics. As we have seen (above, 212-19, 489-95), for Bhabha, antagonism reinforces binaries, whereas mimicry subverts them. This leads him into entanglements with liberal politics. For example, he seems to accept liberal democracy as the most appropriate form of politics. He supports the legal system. He supports political gradualism. He praises many of the effects of neoliberal disjuncture. And he seeks to use and expand the idea of rights, to encompass a 'right to narrate' (see below, 947-61). He vehemently opposes any kind of revolutionary politics. And he hardly ever talks about any kind of socio-economic alternative of his own – or any of the hundreds of alternatives proposed by radicals, such as affinity-groups, degrowth, workers' councils, a basic income, and abolition of work.

So why does Bhabha end up talking like a liberal, when he also vehemently denies and attacks liberalism? I believe there are three reasons for this contradiction. Firstly, Bhabha counsels entanglement with *whatever* ideology happens to be prevalent. If he lived in a Stalinist society, he might strategically deploy Marxist signifiers. But his countries of interest (India, Britain, America) all claim to be liberal democracies, and the current world

order is in principle liberal (or was when Bhabha was writing in the 1980s-90s). Secondly, the use of existing institutions and discourses to pursue partial, contingent demands is very similar to liberal pluralism. Bhabha counsels this approach for strategic rather than principled reasons, but it leads to a tactical orientation to liberalism. Because it's strategic rather than principled, it doesn't require a liberal worldview to underpin it. Finally, the taboos Bhabha places on antagonistic politics, and his rejection of more polarising radical theories, leads to an affinity with liberalism as a matter of course. All of this happens, in spite of Bhabha's hostility to liberalism as a doctrine and a body of thought.

At the level of theory, Bhabha is forcefully opposed to liberalism. His main objection to liberalism, besides its methodological individualism, is its rejection of cultural difference (in his particular sense; see Chapter 9). Liberalism fails to recognise differences among groups or positionalities. It only recognises differences among individuals, because it only recognises individuals. This means it can't even start to think about the co-constitution of group identities. But this is not the worst problem with liberalism. According to Bhabha, liberalism actually sees ethnic group difference as threatening and evil (IoP, 27). In liberal theory, people are meant to relate to each other as individuals who come together in a voluntary social order for mutual advantage. The fact that people belong to communities or positionalities which interfere with this fantasy-image is threatening to liberalism. For Bhabha, the outpourings of liberal outrage and anxiety about ethnic conflict, terrorism, multicultural demands and so on, show that liberalism is afraid of ethnic difference. Liberals might cover this up by recognising 'diversity'. But they can't get past this underlying fear and hatred of radical cultural difference. Also to be avoided, according to Bhabha, are the idea of difference as 'plural choice', and the idea of an 'Ideal Observer' or neutral decision-maker (CIB, 54). According to Bhabha, the language of rights and obligations needs to be questioned based on the disenfranchisement of migrants and minorities (CF, 63). Bhabha believes these exclusions show inherent limits to liberal community and rights. Modern values and stability rest fundamentally on colonialism (CF, 64).



Bhabha characterises English culture as 'liberal-conservative'. It involves a particular idea of liberty and a sense of right conduct or tradition. It rests on customary, rather than statutory, practice. Authority should be immediately recognisable based on custom. British imperialism promoted these ideas worldwide. It involved a particular, customary type of authority. It also involved a model of civil discourse which prevented discussion of colonialism. The horror of ambivalence and cultural difference has to be kept out of polite discourse (LC, 106-7). But the authority of English culture is, like all authority, subverted (see above, 357-364). In the colonies, it mutates into something which combines the contradictory attributes of liberalism and despotism. It is actually founded on an exclusion it cannot see. English authority obtains its meaning only after the colonised site returns its gaze (LC, 107). This returned gaze redirects the eye of power to the primal scene of the formation of identity through ambivalence. Colonialism also subverts liberalism because it shows that the things liberalism takes for granted are culturally particular. It reveals their social construction. For example, modern ideas of labour and property do not exist in some indigenous societies. This has subversive effects on liberal texts which have to deal with this problem (LC, 116). Contact with other cultures makes it harder to view property as natural. Bhabha does not condemn colonial discourse for hypocrisy about human rights. He sees it as progressively disrupting the idea of human

rights. He also makes the same argument about migrants. The proliferation of controls on migrants is actually progressive. It shows the death-in-life, the ambivalence, of the national community, and at once binds and breaches the human rights of the nation (LC, 164). It leads to a questioning of the 'language of rights and obligations, so central to the modern myth of a people' (LC, 175). The suffering of migrants counts for little next to the grand project of disrupting meaning. Indeed, as we have seen, Bhabha actively values and sublimates suffering (see above, 392-3). However, he also supports demands for migrant rights on a strategic basis (see below, 968).

Bhabha also argues, following Foucault, that liberal states experience a contradiction between 'law' and 'order'. This contradiction arises from the contradictory tendencies to individualise or atomise on the one hand, and to reinforce the social totality on the other. In this situation, people in the most marginal social positions are usually the most individualised (LC, 151). In another passage, he associates liberalism with an idea of 'existential, ethical anguish of the empiricism of everyday life in "the eternal living present"' (LC, 157). He seems to have in mind here the kind of routine conviviality and difference recounted in sociology or documentary filmmaking. This kind of everyday co-presence is juxtaposed to the perpetual perplexity Bhabha seeks to create.

Liberalism is closely associated with diversity rather than difference (see above, Chapter 9). Bhabha argues that liberal communities can deal with some kinds of racial or ethnic contradiction. They can deal with different self-contained communities. But they struggle to deal with the 'disjunctive' - the split, in-between nature of subjectivity (SPD, 376). In other words, liberalism can handle differences among communities so long as they are positive differences between separate groups. For example, the fact that some people worship on Sundays and others on Saturdays or Fridays is not a great problem for liberalism. These positive differences can be handled through pluralist compromise and so on. "Reasonable accommodations" can be made using inclusion and diversity policies, welfare states, or legal changes. But when the difference between groups is co-constitutive,

when each group is defined by its exclusion of the other, liberalism cannot handle it. For instance, when white racists start taking Muslim veils as an existential security threat and a refusal to integrate, and some Muslims resultantly start seeing veils as a type of resistance to cultural oppression, it's hard for liberalism to find a solution. Liberal theories do not recognise co-constitution of the subject. They either assume that people actually start out as independent individuals, or that people should be treated as independent individuals so as to manage them politically. This means that, if Bhabha is right about the co-constitutivity of subjectivities, liberalism lacks purchase on important determinants of social identity. Liberalism can recognise diversity in Bhabha's sense, but not difference. Liberal tolerance is thus something that should be unsettled (LC, 177).

Liberal individualism is offensive to Bhabha because he believes that people's identities are co-constituted in relation to other people (see above, 119-20). According to Bhabha, liberals struggle to deal with groups which are not simply groups of individuals (SPD, 376-7). This claim echoes the standard communitarian critique of liberalism advanced by authors such as Sandel (1984, 1998). In Sandel's argument, liberals wrongly treat people as 'unencumbered selves' separate from society. In fact, people always come into politics with prior social attachments based on social relations which make them what they are. Communitarianism is mostly used to promote a politics of forced integration and social control. In Bhabha's case, though, the communitarian critique is turned sideways through its combination with Lacanian psychoanalytic theories of subjectivity. Hence, Bhabha claims that courts and policy institutions struggle to deal with issues of fantasy in the psychoanalytic sense (SPD, 377). What is missing is not just the fact that people belong to communities which are prior to their existence as individuals. It's also the fact that their individual and community identities are formed through the *che vuoi* mechanism (see above, 91-4, 120-1). Hence, courts and parliaments try to deal with conflicts among individuals, or even among separate groups. This means they cannot deal with conflicts which stem from co-constitution and the type of issues Bhabha's theory raises.

In the Margins: Liberal imperialism? Nineteenth-century Britain

Bhabha, and many other postcolonial scholars, work with a standard account of British imperialism. They take Britain to have been a liberal power. On this view, the rulers of imperial Britain were motivated by modernist ideology and its embedded assumptions of humanism and racial superiority. British people saw foreigners as inferior because of these assumptions. This would be a standard case of Derridean supplementarity (see above, 357-64). Britain also sought to export its ideas and institutions – to "civilise" others. In reality, the story goes, this process failed because of the "otherness" of colonial settings (see above, Chapter 7). This led to ambivalence. The historical experience of colonialism thus serves as a basis for a critique of liberalism.

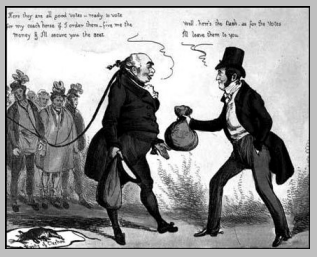
There are a few reasons this view is plausible. Firstly, some liberal writers like John Stuart Mill were ardent imperialists. (There were also liberal critics of imperialism, such as John Hobson). Secondly, free trade ideology played some role in "armed trade" imperialism such as the activities of the East India Company (see above, 522-39). Thirdly, America since 1945 has often tried to justify neocolonial imperialism on liberal grounds. Fourthly, the version of liberalism predominant in universities today is mainly an Establishment version. It reflects the changes in liberalism after 1848, including ideas connected to colonialism. It thus seems plausible today that liberalism is inherently tied-up with colonialism and racism.

However, this view is ahistorical, and historically inaccurate. Modern colonialism began in the sixteenth century. Most of its features were already established by the nineteenth (although the interior of Africa was not invaded until the end of the century). Bhabha's discussions focus on India, which was colonised by Britain. This process of colonisation began seriously in 1612 (when the first East India Company trading post was formed), intensified after 1757 (when the Company began exercising military control over large areas), and shifted when the British state took over from the Company after the 1857 revolt.

The timing of the narrative of liberal imperialism is therefore all wrong. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Britain was not a liberal democracy in anything like the contemporary sense. The political system was oligarchical. Parliament was designed to represent landed elites and merchants. Britain was a constitutional monarchy after 1688. It had been an absolute monarchy in 1612, when the first trading post was founded. But a series of struggles in the seventeenth century (roughly 1640-1688) had largely defeated monarchical absolutism – the idea that the King or Queen could rule as a dictator. However, the monarch retained a constitutionally important role. The unelected House of Lords was far more important in the past than it is today. It was composed of landed aristocrats. Laws and decisions had to pass through both the Lords and the elected Commons. For most of the period, most men, and all women, were denied the vote. People had to

own a significant amount of property to be allowed to vote. There were partial extensions of the franchise in 1832 and 1867. In the 1840s, the Chartists protested and revolted, demanding votes for workers. The revolt was brutally suppressed, although the franchise was gradually expanded later. Working-class people had no say in British imperial policy. And women did not win the vote until the twentieth century.

Before 1832, most elected Members of Parliament represented historical regions known as boroughs. Some of these boroughs contained 12,000 people. Others contained twelve or fewer. The tiny boroughs returned two MPs each, just like the larger ones. They were known as "rotten boroughs". Corrupt wealthy politicians could effectively buy seats by taking over a "rotten borough" - buying the land and putting in their own tenants.

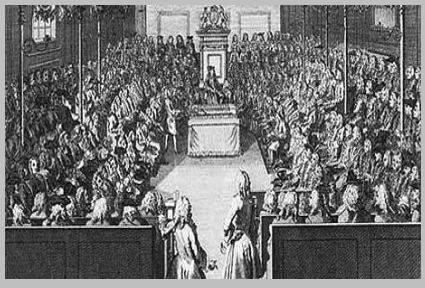


W. Heath, "How to Get Made an MP" (1830)

In some boroughs, only members of the "corporation" - the mercantile governing body – could vote. Overall, less than 3% of the British population could vote. Secret ballots were not introduced until 1872, meaning voters were often bribed or intimidated. One scholar suggests that, out of 514 elected seats in England and Wales, 370 – more than two-thirds – were bought by fewer than 200 wealthy patrons (May, 1896:361-2). In Britain in this period, there was not a hegemonic ideology supported by most of the population. There was a lot of instability within Britain until the 1840s. This suggests that the government's perceived legitimacy with the wider population was rather low (Lacher and German, 2012:106). Imperialism in India was not the policy of a unified national polity. It was the policy of one fraction of a small ruling elite.

The carve-up of Parliament was closely tied to colonialism. Merchants who made fortunes in India or the West Indies were known as 'nabobs', from the Indian title Nawab. They were notorious for corruption. They even managed to take control of boroughs previously held by the landed elite (Cavaliero, 2002:65). These colonial merchants were more likely to become Tories rather than Whigs (see above, 536). For long periods in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, a small group of imperialist merchants were able to capture the institutions which controlled colonialism.

Parliament was mainly representative of landed and merchant elites. Over time, merchants became stronger, but policy was still often made by the conservative landed elites. For example, in 1815, Britain introduced the Corn Laws. These were protectionist laws designed to restrict food imports. They reflected the concerns of the landed aristocracy, not the merchants. And they went sharply against liberal free trade ideology. The Corn Laws were not abolished until 1846. Britain was not, in this period, particularly liberal. The Tories (later renamed Conservatives) were in government as often as the Whigs (later renamed Liberals). From 1783 to 1830, the Tories were in power for every year but one. After the 1832 Reform Act (which extended the vote to a larger number of middle-class people who were likely to vote Liberal), the two parties alternated in power. When working-class men received the vote, it was not long until the Liberals were eclipsed by the social-democratic Labour Party. Labour eventually played an important role in dismantling the empire after 1945.



The world order in this period was also far from liberal. In 1789, France had a revolution which overthrew the monarchy. After a complicated series of post-revolutionary political events, Napoleon became dictator. He tried to conquer Europe, supposedly in the name of revolutionary ideology. But France was

defeated by other countries including Britain and Russia. In 1815, the victorious powers – and a new, conservative French government – met to design a post-war order in Europe. The result was the Treaty of Vienna. The major powers – Britain, France, Russia, the Habsburg Empire (later Austria-Hungary), and Prussia (part of the later Germany) – agreed to create a conservative order. Existing regimes were to be preserved at all costs. The legitimacy of monarchies and traditional religions was not to be challenged. European states cooperated to suppress liberal, nationalist, secularist and socialist movements which threatened existing regimes. Some scholars believe that Britain established a kind of hegemony after 1815. In particular, it restricted the ability of other European countries to prevent trade liberalisation or British colonialism (Wallerstein, 2016:3, 14; Lambert, 2002:165). However, the British government did not try to spread its ideology or provide institutions to underpin a cooperative order. It accepted and cooperated with a conservative order run by other European powers.

The order which emerged was reactionary and restorationist – not liberal. All the major participants were conservative monarchies of various kinds. States were assumed to have a common interest in preserving legitimacy and stability, and avoiding revisionism (for example, separatist movements and revolutions). This formed the basis for alliances among conservative powers (Kissinger, 1994:82). Central to this settlement was a choice to blame French revolutionary ideology (rather than geopolitical or economic interests) for the Napoleonic Wars (de Sauvigny, 1966:86, 91; Haas, 2003:92). This narrative led to a view that radical, liberal and nationalist regimes are dangerous threats to world order. These regimes are prone to "revisionism", or the desire to revise existing orders. Conservative "status quo powers" are to be preferred over revisionists, because revisionists cause wars and

instability. Monarchies (whether absolute or constitutional) were considered to be status quo powers. This kind of argument is today common in liberal theory in International Relations – but with the added qualifier that capitalist liberal-democracies on the US model are now considered exemplary status quo powers. There are many similarities between the reactionary Vienna settlement and the attempt in the 2000s to unite global elites against "new threats" such as "terrorists", "rogue states", migrants, hackers, and anti-capitalists. American conservatives continue to focus on "revisionist" powers and the supposed dangers posed by regime-types other than America's.

The ideological focus on preserving existing regimes meant that relatively liberal countries often worked closely with extremely reactionary absolute monarchies. There were various occasions when powerful states could have taken advantage of internal instability in other states to expand their territory, but chose not to do so. For example, subordinate ethnic groups within the Austrian and Turkish empires repeatedly sought independence, but other states usually cooperated to prevent this. It seems that European powers were more worried about revolution than they were about one another (Jervis, 1992:721; Haas, 2003:82; D'Urso, 2015; Kissinger, 1994:94). Only after 1830 was there a division of sorts into liberal and conservative powers. France and Britain had liberalised to some degree, whereas Russia, Prussia and Austria had not. However, there were still long periods of peace and cooperation between the two clusters of powers.

British colonialism in India was already well-established by 1830. Territorial control by the East India Company outside its trading ports had started in 1757. In this period, colonialism acted as a safety valve to protect the conservative order

in Europe. Conflict in Europe was headed off partly through the expansion of trade and colonialism in other parts of the world. Indeed, it has been suggested that the stability arising within Europe led to greater imperialism by European states elsewhere (Black, 2015:104, 1119). This situation persisted until the expansion of trade by different countries came into conflict. After 1870, empires were reconfigured as exclusive trade zones, and rivalries between imperial powers increased.

Britain was a constitutional monarchy. It was not part of the ultra-reactionary Holy Alliance of absolutist powers. However, it did not try to export its own institutions abroad. It has been suggested that 'Britain treated its parliamentary institutions as devoid of relevance to other societies'. Even within Europe, Britain did not try to make other countries democratic (Kissinger, 1994:101). Indeed, Britain often sought to protect ultra-conservative and reactionary groups in other parts of Europe. Britain sought to discourage industrialisation in other countries. This is consistent with a strategy of keeping Britain at the top of an international division of labour, with a monopoly on high-value-added sectors (Lacher and Germann, 2012:110-12). For example, Britain allied with the German Junkers – the old landed aristocracy – because they helped to keep Germany's economy focused on agriculture instead of industry. This stopped Germany becoming a competitor to Britain and ensured it would supply Britain with cheap food instead.

Britain did not promote global free trade until the Whigs gained power in the 1840s (O'Brien and Pigman, 1992:111). Between 1815-46 British Governments continued to pursue 'conjoined geopolitical and commercial objectives using traditional power resources' (1992:111). Even after 1846, Britain did not seek to force open other European markets. It adopted a unilateral free trade position which made it hard to pressure other countries into free trade agreements. British

leaders rhetorically promoted global free trade in the relatively brief period from 1846 to 1870 (O'Brien and Pigman, 1992:111; Copeland, 2015:335). After 1870, liberalism went into relative decline as relationships between European powers with large colonial empires became increasingly competitive. In short, liberal Britain only lasted about 25 years. This period included, however, the important events of the 1857 Indian revolt and the abolition of the East India Company. Liberal ideas of political and economic development and the civilising mission played an important role in the reform of the colonial regime after 1857.

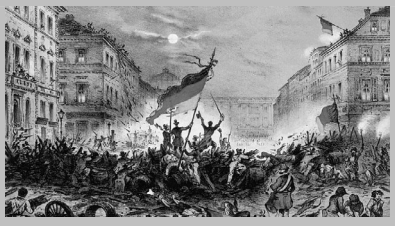
The Opium Wars (1839-42 and 1856-60), in which Britain used military force to coerce China into continuing to import opium from British India, were partly justified in liberal economic terms. However, the arrangements imposed on China were not a free trade system. They involved mercantile

"treaty ports" controlled by merchants from European countries. British imperial politics seems to have been motivated by economics, rather than ideology. And it is also notable that free trade in addictive drugs is not a common position among liberals. Liberals and neoliberals have not been vocal in opposing the "war on drugs" since the 1970s. Indeed, they have often been among its proponents. British trade with Asia in the nineteenth century was not in any case liberal. The East India Company had a monopoly on opium exports until 1834. British state interests intertwined with those of the Company and of private merchants. Foreign trade was also tied-up with competition with other European powers. As a result, policy was often mercantilist rather than liberal. The government sought to actively promote exports for national economic purposes.

A recent historian examines the causes of the Opium Wars and finds economics a more likely explanation than ideology or status. The opium trade was important for mercantile reasons. The Chinese economy was still strong in the early nineteenth century. It was not yet in a dependent or subordinate position. Britain imported Chinese tea and silk, but China did not need British exports. Britain solved this problem with opium exports from British-occupied India. If China cut off the opium trade, Britain would have to spend its gold and silver reserves, or do without imports. The East India Company and its successors would be threatened. The motivation for the war was thus largely mercantile. A historian analyses the situation as follows: 'Recognition of opium's importance to the whole British economy had caused the British government to project naval power into the Canton region when the East India Company monopoly ended in 1833... [B]ecause the British did not seek formal control of China, it is hard to argue that the fall off in the opium trade in 1839 unleashed preexisting domestic pathologies such as glory seeking and the desire to spread Britain's ideology' (Copeland, 2015:346). The wars helped Britain's finances, but they did not help global free trade. Opium exports did not help to integrate China into global trade. The reduced productivity of workers addicted to opium reduced the competitiveness of Chinese industry. Indeed, this was one of the reasons the Chinese regime wanted to suppress opium. Rather, the opium trade was a way for Britain to make China more dependent, or at least, to avoid Britain's becoming dependent on uneven trade to China's advantage.

Movements for liberalism in Europe mostly came from revolutionary groups opposed to the restorationist set-up. Before the emergence of socialism, progressive intellectuals often adopted liberal or republican ideas. Liberalism was also encouraged by nationalists who wanted their countries to move up the value chain, rather than remain subordinate in the global division of labour. There was often a loose alliance of liberals, civic republicans, Romantics, nationalists, and early socialists and anarchists against the so-called *ancien régime* – the conservative established order. In 1848, a series of revolutionary revolts, street insurrections,

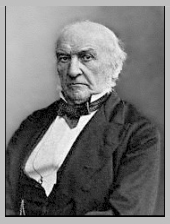
and guerrilla uprisings occurred across Europe – in France, the Austrian empire, the German and Italian states, Denmark, Spain, Belgium, Poland, Romania, and elsewhere. These were directed mainly against absolute monarchy and aimed for varying degrees of political reform. Participants included elite reformists, the middle classes, workers, peasants, and minority nationalities. Many of these revolutions were initially successful. In France, a republic was proclaimed. In Hungary, protests demanding constitutional reform developed into a war of independence from Austria. Other areas saw popular councils with mass general assemblies established.



However, reactionaries managed to regroup and take back power. In some cases, important reforms (such as the abolition of serfdom, and greater autonomy for minority nationalities) were not reversed. On the whole, however, the revolts were crushed. Some countries, like France, became dictatorships. Others, like Hungary, were placed under martial law. Major states cooperated to suppress the revolts and take back liberated territories. Leading rebels were killed or fled into exile. Both the French Revolution and the 1848 revolutions were also connected to anti-colonial rebellions in the Americas. Most of Latin America achieved independence in the early nineteenth century. The cluster of revolutionary ideas motivating these independence struggles were similar to those seen in Europe in 1848.

1848 was far from the last revolutionary wave in Europe. But it was the last wave in which liberalism played a significant role. The period after 1848 was marked by "passive revolution" - a process in which conservative forces

implement some of the demands of radical movements in order to preserve their power, but in a watered-down form which keeps the status quo intact. There was a process of recuperation or deradicalisation of liberalism during the nineteenth century. Liberalism was tamed through a process of repression followed by top-down reform (Wallerstein, 2016:18). Once conservative regimes began to liberalise, the meaning of liberalism changed. The associations of liberalism with opposition to the *ancien régime* and with popular power was lost.



Liberalism was increasingly associated with technocracy, or rule by experts, rather than with popular power. Only after this happened did the elite begin to see liberalism as a model to be exported abroad. The same kind of repression/recuperation dynamic was repeated later, with socialism in the early twentieth century, and then with the New Left (including anti-colonialism, anti-racism, poststructuralism, and feminism) from the 1970s onwards.

Overall, therefore, people who see colonialism as an effect or a constitutive underside of liberalism have the timeframe completely wrong. Liberals were not in power in the European states during the formative years of colonialism. East India Company rule in India was tied-up with conservatism in Britain. By the time the British state took over control of India, it was embracing certain liberal ideas. By this time, however, liberalism had been twisted into technocracy. Colonialism was not generated by liberalism as an ideological effect. Rather, it was carried out by conservative, authoritarian states which were at the same time absorbing and declawing liberalism. The liberalism exported to India was not liberalism in its initial form. It contained large doses of conservatism, statism and technocracy.

Post-1945 America has promoted liberalisation far more aggressively than Britain ever did. However, the same contradictions rapidly emerged. The American economy has considerable state intervention which makes free trade advantageous for American companies abroad. For example, America dominates markets by exporting subsidised food. Colonial powers have also continued to pressure subordinate regions to remain in less-profitable, dependent roles in the world economy. For example, the Structural Adjustment Policies of the 1980s (see above, 639-42) forced postcolonial countries to abandon industrialisation and focus on agriculture or mining. America after 1945 often supported extremely reactionary regimes, and not liberal reformers, in Latin America, the Middle East and Southeast Asia. Many Latin American regimes after 1945 relied heavily on a landowning elite who controlled large *latifundia*, or plantations. America heavily supported these regimes against demands for land reform, in much the same way Britain supported the Junkers. In the Middle East, America supported monarchies and religious regimes which could provide security for American oil supplies. It opposed nationalist regimes which sought to industrialise or redistribute oil revenues. Hence, America might have claimed to promote liberal democracy, but in fact, it often bolstered reactionary autocracy.

Another difference between Bhabha and liberalism is their affective politics. As we have seen (above, 331-46), Bhabha tends to encourage negative, disempowering and reactive affects. This contrasts sharply with the empowering, affirmative, active affects of radical politics (see above, 544-9). But it also contrasts with the moderating, pragmatic, often bureaucratic affects of liberal theory. Liberals and other "moderate" theorists (e.g. social-democrats, deliberative democrats) tend to focus on interests and preferences rather than affects. They seek win-win solutions based on compromise or optimisation. They urge people to be calm, reasonable, and deliberative – to rely on reason, not passion (c.f.

Hirschman, 1997). Liberals assume a context of moderate scarcity. There's not enough for everyone to have everything they want, but there's ways people can be better-off by obeying rules and working together. This means that the joyous expressive force of radical politics is ruled-out as unrealistic, but the extreme scarcity of zero-sum competition is also unnecessary. This brings them into conflict with Bhabha's view of affect, which tends towards the zero-sum view. In line with the idea of constitutive lack, Bhabha takes reactive affects as expressions of the split, co-constituted, ambiguous nature of reality. Moderate scarcity denies the absolute, subject-constituting nature of ambiguity and the inherent insatiability of desire. Liberal and deliberative approaches are generally conceived as unable to handle the realities underlying such affects. They either ignore it, or try to manage and contain it bureaucratically.

To take an example, Bhabha denounces Habermas's model of communicative rationality. Habermas is a deliberative democrat, and not strictly speaking a liberal. But in general, he is politically close to liberal positions. Bhabha's objection to Habermas is that his politics is a politics of arriving at consensus. Therefore, Bhabha believes that it cannot handle cases of colonial cultures caught in a master-slave dialectic (FBI, 50). In other words, when two subject-positions are co-constituted, it is futile to try to reconcile them by meeting everyone's (separate) needs, compromising on their interests, or bringing them into dialogue. Their very identities require conflict, and an adequate theoretical and political response must recognise this. Elsewhere, Bhabha repeats his criticism of Habermas's belief in consensus. However, he praises Habermas's view that culture has become dispersed in a context of social differentiation (CIB, 55).

Similarly, Hannah Arendt is criticised for a 'liberal' view of social 'togetherness' which supposedly cannot handle the agency of marginalised groups (LC, 190). Arendt is praised for her articulation of a gap between political agents and the causes of political outcomes. But her view of politics lacks the *che vuoi* dimension. The "postmodernist" liberal Richard Rorty gets similar treatment. His approach is deemed 'disempowering... for the non-

Western other' and 'steeped in Western ethnocentricism' (LC, 192). The grounds for these accusations are unclear, but the citations Bhabha uses focus on two points: the adequacy of liberal democracy and the theoretical irrelevance of revolutionary courage for reflective thought. Bhabha believes that Rorty allows insufficient space for subaltern agency. For Bhabha, such agency is rooted in the *che vuoi* mechanism. This mechanism is missing from Rorty, and he therefore cannot conceive of such agency (c.f. below, 936-7). However, Bhabha elsewhere praises Rorty for his pragmatism and his preference for verbal over visual thinking (CA, 41).

Along similar lines, Bhabha is opposed to the liberal notion of consent, because it encourages a liberal model of the subject (SPD, 376). Since people are co-constituted, they should not be assumed to have ethically important boundaries against others, the transgression of which is prohibited. It is not clear what implications this would have for gender politics and sexual harassment in particular. Most likely, Bhabha has other grounds for supporting feminist claims in these areas. However, there is also a danger of political intrusiveness in the idea of co-constitutivity. Liberalism may well be wrong in its assumption that people can be treated as surface-level, choosing selves, and that unconscious and transpersonal levels either don't exist, or can be bracketed out. Such individualising tendencies lead, for instance, to impossible demands on people, and unfair attributions of responsibility (Smail, 1993). However, there are many ways to talk about the unconscious and about social construction besides Bhabha's Lacanian/Derridean ontology. For example, Reich, Jung and Guattari have distinct theories of the unconscious, and theorists like Stirner and Nietzsche also theorise motivation differently from both liberalism and Bhabha. Social constructivism might also follow the paths of Korzybski, or Castoriadis, or many others. Some of these theories recognise some substance or weight to individual or sub-individual motivation, and the possibility that social demands can violate personal freedom or conflict with the needs of the unconscious. Bhabha's, on the whole, does not.

In 'Liberalism's Sacred Cow', Bhabha engages at length with liberal multiculturalism. His particular target is Susan Moller Okin, a liberal feminist and follower of Rawls,. Bhabha dislikes the way liberals relate the 'high moral ground' to particular cases, which he terms 'depths' (LSC, 79). He sees in this application of rules to cases, and reliance on 'the discourse of the courtroom', a treatment of minorities as 'virtual citizens' who are not quite fully present in the west (LSC, 80-1). According to Bhabha, Okin treats non-western cultures as if they are stuck in a 'time-warp', caught in pre-modern traditions, when in fact they are not. She also ignores other cultures' histories of change and protest (LSC, 82). His main objection is that she produces 'monolithic', 'ahistorical', 'patronizing' stereotypes of other cultures as sexist (LSC, 79, 81-2). She thus treats cultures as knowable objects, rather than fluxes of signification. And she focuses on cultures as discrete units, ignoring the experiences of migration and colonialism. On this basis, Okin argues that other cultures treat women as domestic or sexual objects. She sees liberalism as superior despite its limitations (LSC, 80). Bhabha sees this account as essentialist.

However, Bhabha distances his view from the accusations of Eurocentrism which it seems to echo (LSC, 83). In particular, he does not object to the application of values from outside a culture per se. Rather, he objects mainly to the tone of liberalism: it acts as 'measure and mentor', 'without a shadow of self-doubt', with 'zealousness' he associates the colonial civilising mission, and it sees its failings as practical/contingent rather than constitutive (LSC, 83). This is a strange line of critique, particularly given Bhabha's own certainty about his basic presuppositions. It is as if he cares more about tearing down liberal egos than about the politics of liberalism. If only liberals were less certain, less zealous, more ambivalent, more anxious, their souls would be virtuous and their politics unobjectionable. Having decided that Okin is the wrong kind of subject, Bhabha distrusts everything she proposes. Even the apparently innocuous suggestion that younger women need to be included in discussions (not just community elders) is framed as 'divide and rule'. Liberalism, says Bhabha, is neither foreign nor generational (LSC, 83). This is despite the fact that, elsewhere in the same piece, Bhabha uses the same idea of generational differences (LSC, 81). It seems that his problem with Okin's response is not so much that its basis is wrong, as that it involves a problem-solving approach rather than an opening to endless ambivalence.

Bhabha advances a number of arguments against the "traditional patriarchy" stereotype. Firstly, women are also subject to high levels of violence in western liberal countries (LSC, 80). Secondly, issues of group rights and cultural defence need to be placed in the context of migration, colonialism, and change (LSC, 80). Thirdly, there is no monolithic patriarchal culture in (for example) India. Patriarchy intersects with poverty, illiteracy and caste. It is challenged generationally, by younger people. And Indian women are often caught between the demands of 'Western liberal patriarchy' and those of aggressive localists (LSC, 81). This last issue means that the choice to seek or reject state protection is a choice between two kinds of patriarchy and patronisation (LSC, 82-3). Bhabha thinks people should take sides 'on one side or the other' on issues such as state protection, but not without 'cultural translation' (LSC, 83). He does not specify which side he takes, and he does not offer any third alternative. Indeed, this piece is extremely light on concrete proposals. Instead, Bhabha proposes an 'unfinished work of creating a more viable, intracultural community of rights' (LSC, 84).

Although Bhabha believes that liberalism is wrong in its basic assumptions, he insists that it is not to be abandoned. Writing in the mid-1990s, Bhabha argues that critical theorists should constantly negotiate between liberal ideas, such as rights and democracy, and radical critiques of these ideas (TT, 114, 116). Such a position of in-betweenness is to be preferred to antagonistic rejection of liberalism. This paradoxically renders Bhabha more open to conversations with liberals than with radicals. Radicalisms such as Marxism, which deconstruct and then actually reject liberal ideas, or which read liberalism too simplistically, are not 'worth having much truck with' (TT, 116). Bhabha's justification for this position is that liberalism is the ideology of power. For Bhabha on this occasion, deconstructing something is completely different from rejecting its practical power. He thinks people should keep using the practical power of liberal ideas, even after showing that they are based on racist or capitalist premises. The idea of rights, for instance, is flawed but unavoidable in confronting oppression. Critics of individual agency, amongst whom Bhabha includes himself, also need to provide a more viable alternative account of ethical

or communal agency (TT, 116). Discourses – for example, modernity – have no value in themselves. They are to be seized, opened up and transformed (LC, 242). Hence, the radical theoretical rejection of a discourse is not followed through into its practical rejection. Bhabha also claims that liberalism is often still present in radical conceptions of agency (TT, 116). This is a standard repetition of the idea that ontological individualism is part of 'liberalism' broadly defined.

Bhabha's argument for using liberal discourse is similar to the practice Spivak (1990) terms 'strategic essentialism'. The danger with such a position is that people can end up acting as liberals even while rejecting its ideas. In effect, they 'perform' socially as 'good subjects' of the existing regime, even while keeping an inner, ironic distance. They act and speak like liberals, even though they 'know better'. For some critics, such as Žižek, this means they are really liberals, no matter what they claim. Normal social roles already depend on a degree of critical distance. Žižek uses the example of the film *Shrek*. Some radical theorists praise *Shrek* for its ironic subversion of dominant ideas - because for instance, instead of the princess turning the monster into a handsome prince, she turns into a monster herself. For Žižek, this misses the vital point that the basic structure of the story is upheld in its ironic repretition. This is still a love story, the characters become the same and then marry, and so on (Žižek, 2002). Slotkin (2008a, 2008b) similarly discusses the difference between ironising the Western genre and its eventual collapse. Irony arose when the discourse was still intact, prior to its full decomposition, and helped to sustain it. To take a more widespread example, it's likely that nobody 'really believes' that commodities have the magical powers theorised in Marx's account of commodity fetishism. For example, most people know very well that money is socially conventional rather than natural. But, by acting *as if* they really believe, people succeed in giving commodities the magical powers posited by the theory. The ironic distance involved in 'not really believing' in the social system is an ideological cover for really conforming to it.

Communitarianism

While he is not (in his own terms) a liberal, Bhabha also rejects the best-known mainstream critique of liberalism: communitarianism. Communitarians are similar to Bhabha in believing that people are socially constructed and dependent on speech-communities. However, they take this claim in socially conservative directions. They maintain that, since people depend on communities for their identities and capabilities, communities are morally more important than individuals. People's positive freedom to develop fully and be all they can be, requires strong, integrated communities with socially-defined values. Therefore, individual needs and desires should be sacrificed for the good of the community. For communitarians, liberals are wrong to take the individual as the basis of politics. People always start out with communal commitments and relationships which determine who they are. Communitarians can be conservatives or quasi-socialists. Generally, they idealise Ancient Greek city-states and early American settler communities with high levels of public participation. The communitarian critique is often conservative and authoritarian in its implications, since it implies that social traditions should trump individual (and group) rights. It has been criticised by feminists in particular for promoting authoritarian forms of community (Young, 1990; Gutmann, 1985). As we have seen, Bhabha's view that liberals cannot deal with co-constituted subjectivities is similar to communitarian positions. Indeed, Bhabha approvingly cites the communitarian Charles Taylor on the question of rationality (LC, 177). Richard Sennett also receives sympathetic treatment (CA, 45).

Communitarianism is wrong from Bhabha's point of view because it essentialises communities in the same way that liberalism essentialises individuals. It talks about communities as if they exist in themselves, when they're actually co-constituted through in-between spaces. For Bhabha, this is mistaken because is treats communities as unified wholes. Real communities are always haunted by ambiguity. Worse, communitarianism leaves marginal people – the bearers of ambiguity – outside social consideration. Communitarians such as Charles Taylor are unable to recognise migrant and diasporic peoples, because their definition of culture is based on fixity and local belonging (MM, 451). Migrants don't belong to the kind of locally self-sufficient tradition Taylor assumes, because their identities shift between two places. Bhabha also insists that freedom does not come from 'expansive fused horizons' but from a 'bending toward freedom' arising from anxiety, oppression and the inbetween space (MM, 451). In other words, there isn't an overarching, integrated tradition which determines people's individual identities. Instead, each tradition is itself ambiguous and deferred. The desire for justice operates within each tradition by playing up its gaps and ambiguities. Communitarianism cuts this off by treating traditions as if they are closed and final. It thus shuts itself off to the claims of marginalised groups. In one passage, Bhabha swipes at communitarian Alistair McIntyre by associating him with the persecutors of Rushdie. Like McIntyre, the "fundamentalists" associate correct naming with tradition and social cohesion, and this makes a translational, inbetween 'poetics of relocation and reinscription' like Rushdie's a threat (LC, 225).

Bhabha repeats this argument in a later piece. Taylor, he argues, endorses the same pluralist view of diversity as liberal theorists. He dismisses 'partial' cultures and only recognises cultures of 'whole societies over some considerable stretch of time' (CIB, 57). He therefore provides no space for the disjunctures and inbetwenness Bhabha associates with oppressed groups. Further, he suggests that these inbetween groups 'give the lie to [the nation's] self-containedness' (CIB, 57). They are a constitutive outside which is also

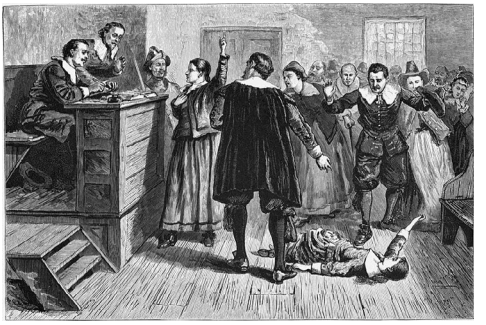
inside, an extimate part (see above, 326-30). Taylor, according to Bhabha, 'disavow[s]' this (CIB, 57). Bhabha offers a symptomatic reading of Taylor's work, suggesting the disavowed part is still registered. Bhabha's evidence for this is that Taylor is concerned with the question of how to address minorities' sense of marginalisation without compromising 'our' (i.e. the ingroup's) 'basic political principles'. For Bhabha, this is a mistaken way of posing the problem. It uses a 'them/us' binary instead of recognising 'the historically and temporally disjunct positions that minorities occupy within the nation's space' (CIB, 57). Of course, the accusation of 'disavowal' is question-begging. Bhabha's critique relies on ontological premises Taylor rejects. The critique is only valid if these premises are true. And the fact that Taylor, like most scholars, sees minority marginalisation as a political issue, hardly proves that inbetweenness is present as a "symptom". As so often, Bhabha hides the basic ontological controversy behind psychoanalytic terminology. 'Disavowal' means the simultaneous affirmation and denial of a traumatic fact (see above, 454). But Taylor does not at once affirm and deny inbetweenness. Instead, he uses a model where other cultures are not inbetween at all. Minorities are marginalised, not because they are disjunctive and inbetween, but because they are culturally different. This might be wrong, but it is not 'disavowal'.

Bhabha makes a similar point in another piece. He criticises in particular Taylor's statement that '[w]e define our identity always in dialogue with, sometimes in struggle against, the things our significant others want to see in us' (cited ONO, 10). For Bhabha, this does not take co-constitution far enough. It continues to maintain the 'sovereignty of identity'. Taylor talks about subjective identity interacting with others' views. For Bhabha, the subject is instead an effect which emerges *through* others' views (ONO, 10-11; see above, 119-20).

Elsewhere, Bhabha takes a brief sideswipe at a leftist postmodern critic of identity politics. 'The resistance to acknowledg[ing] a cosmopolitanism that is born from the... postcolonial condition is centred in the agonizing of those, like Robert Hughes, who are the prophets of the "fraying" of the West. They refuse to envisage a form of culture that does not ground its beliefs and values in the integrity of... national "commonality"' (ANNS, 216). Hughes is himself a cosmopolitan migrant, an Australian who eventually settled in America. Hughes' book, *Culture of Complaint: The Fraying of America* (Hughes, 1993), is an episodic, satirical, polemical critique of polarising forms of identity politics (often the same ones Bhabha elsewhere denounces). Hughes values convivial coexistence, "virtues" such as dignity and hard work, and self-chosen ways of life. He dislikes political polarisation, claims to victimhood, "narcissism", and endless complaint. He thus echoes aspects of the communitarian position. While Hughes's objections come from a number of angles, Bhabha can see nothing in his work except nationalistic nostalgia. Hence, Bhabha subjects him to a series of snarl-words such as 'prophet', 'resistance', and 'agonizing'.

Bhabha sharply criticises Hughes' proposal for 'getting along by making practical compromises to meet real social needs'. He portrays this pragmatist position as if it were an absurdly utopian proposal. Hughes presents it as a solution. 'But couldn't this panacea... be what induces the panic and frustration rather than what calms it?' (ANNS, 216). In other words, Bhabha claims that it is only because Hughes believes in pragmatic coexistence that he suffers because of its absence. It is as if looking for solutions or coexistence is the cause of all the problems to begin with. It is not clear why the idea of convivial coexistence is so offensive to Bhabha. It does not seem very different from his own recommendations for pragmatism, recognition and a culture of survival (see below, 914-19). Perhaps it is offensive only because it is uttered by a white man and wrapped-up in a polemic against the 'culture of complaint'. Or maybe it is Hughes' association of coexistence with American (or Australian) *history* which renders it intolerable (genocide is not peaceful coexistence). But there is also a major difference in tone between Bhabha's

passive-aggressive philosophy of co-constitution and simple coexistence. The former involves a much deeper mutual entanglement, focused on the past as much as the present. Hughes dislikes the focus on fragments instead of the "big picture", whereas for Bhabha, the jagged fragments are the disavowed truth of the big picture (ANNS, 216). Bhabha also claims that Hughes simply *cannot imagine* the kind of community he himself envisages. The belief that the model of community proposed by Bhabha may not be viable is certainly worthy of more serious consideration than a dismissal as 'resistance' and 'denial' suggests. Bhabha's vision of disjunctive community is both paradoxical and vague, and also unrealised. There is little surprise that it is not apparent to everyone.



Bhabha also discusses Martha Nussbaum, an American multiculturalist and feminist philosopher influenced by Aristotle, whose thought bears some resemblances to communitarianism and liberalism. Nussbaum advocates a type of context-sensitive universal ethics which emphasises how social oppression can override individual freedom and goodness. Since people are inherently vulnerable, public life needs to protect against discrimination and objectification. Bhabha's critique of Nussbaum is that her universalism is actually 'provincial', or local. It involves a particular model of a given community centred on the self (UMLA, 6). According to Bhabha, this

image is actually very much local and provincial. It is exclusively modern European (and Euro-American). Most cultures do not experience themselves this way.

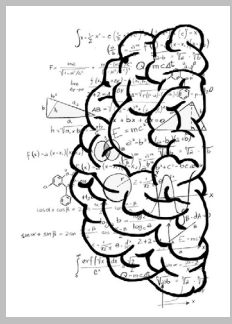
Marginal groups also lack the 'givenness' of community and self, experiencing the world as split and displaced. In general, therefore, Bhabha rejects the idea of starting from

individual autonomy (despite the fact that his own assumptions of co-constitution and discursive determination are equally "provincial" and European). This seems to undercut his defence of human rights (see Chapter 15).

In the Margins: Liberalism and Communitarianism

Bhabha is a philosopher from the global South, who works largely within the Continental (European) tradition of philosophy. This places him in conflict with the analytical liberalism common in the English-speaking countries where he works. The foundations for analytical liberalism lie in the work of Immanuel Kant. Kant believed that it is possible to separate moral duty from the diverse influences of the world and of people's desires. The rational self can deduce moral duties from first principles. These first principles are independent of social influences and desires. Kant is one of the most iconic theorists of "modern reason" and one of the most frequent targets of postcolonial and decolonial theory. Contemporary analytical philosophy also has roots in theories of logic such as those of Frege, Russell and Ayer.

Kant's philosophy was largely abandoned in Europe due to the rise of Hegel, Marxism, psychoanalysis, and existentialism. Theories of logic were largely replaced by theories of language and discourse, such as structuralism (see above, 88-96). But McCarthyism and other political pressures prevented similar developments in America and Britain. As a result, Anglo-American philosophers kept looking at issues raised by people like Kant and Frege. They mostly continue to think that they can deduce true moral principles from abstract reason. They do not seek to challenge and deconstruct dominant "common sense" beliefs the way Continental and "Third World" philosophers do. They usually also show a lot of loyalty to existing American and British political institutions. There isn't much interaction between the scholarship on analytical philosophy and the English-speaking writers who use Continental philosophy. The second group of writers mostly work in academic disciplines other than philosophy.



Until the 1970s, Anglo-American political philosophy was dominated by utilitarianism and what is now called "intuitionism". Utilitarianism is a theory that claims that the most basic moral principle is the overall balance of pleasure over pain. If something causes more suffering than pleasure, it's wrong or bad. Otherwise it's right or good. Since it's impossible to know in individual cases where the balance lies, most utilitarians advocate the formulation of general rules which tend to maximise pleasure over pain when they're applied. Utilitarianism is the best-known of a group of theories known as consequentialism. All consequentialist theories maintain that right and wrong are defined by good and bad consequences. Consequentialism is often criticised because it contradicts the widespread belief that certain

actions are always wrong, however much benefit they bring. Intuitionism is the Rawlsian term for theories which don't look for a systematic basis at all. They just try to rearrange institutions in socially beneficial ways. They pursue a number of distinct goals without trying to balance or reconcile them. When conflicts arise among the goals, they look for intuitively appealing ways to solve them. Social-democratic approaches are usually intuitionist in this sense. Intuitionism and utilitarianism were highly compatible with Fordism.

The general crisis of Fordist capitalism in the 1970s also affected political philosophy. It was in this context that John Rawls wrote his *Theory of Justice* (Rawls, 1977). This work transformed the way political philosophy is done in the English-speaking world. Very few philosophers agree exactly with Rawls's theory. But Rawls in many ways designed a problem-field, a set of questions, and also a way of doing political philosophy which have been copied by other people. Most Anglo-American political philosophers work within the field created by Rawls. Other writers disagree drastically with Rawls's assumptions and conclusions. But they use largely the same approach. Rawls, like Kant, is a deontologist. This means that he does not think political principles can be derived from worldly consequences. Actions should be judged as right or wrong based on a set of rules or principles.

Analytical political philosophy tries in many ways to do the impossible. It tries to reconcile the confused, irrational common sense of contemporary capitalist societies with rigorous logical and ethical principles. The ultimate court of moral appeal is "our considered convictions". These are the moral convictions of competent moral judges. In other words, they are the existing common sense beliefs of a particular stratum of British or American liberals. They are not generally explored empirically. Instead, they are derived from an individual theorist's claims about what they and/or others believe. Nonetheless, Anglo-American theorists often write as if they are speaking for the entire

social collective when they articulate these beliefs. Socially dominant common sense (as perceived or exemplified by the theorist) is taken to be the ultimate court of appeal. It can be reinterpreted and tweaked to make it more logically consistent. But it is not itself critiqued. It is the ultimate basis on which critiques of individual ideas rest. It is also assumed to have a rational basis. In other words, everyday moral convictions are assumed to be based on invisible logical principles. These principles can be modelled and reconstructed so as to construct a more consistent theory and resolve disagreements. And it's the job of political philosophers to do this.

To complicate things a bit, considered convictions are not entirely above criticism. One of the roles of Anglo-American political theory is to clarify convictions and render them more systematic. This often involves changing less important convictions to bring them into line with more important ones. In particular, Anglo-American theorists attempt to resolve controversial issues using logical arguments premised on common beliefs. The way they do this is through a particular style of argument. They take a supposedly uncontentious case, derive from it a general principle, and then apply the principle to the contentious case. For instance, they might argue that it's generally accepted that people shouldn't be forced to give up organs to save other people's lives. This shows that liberal societies value bodily integrity. And the principle of bodily integrity means that abortion should also be legal. The controversial issue of abortion is "resolved" through a principle derived from the (supposedly) uncontroversial issue of forced transplants. Of course, a different choice of uncontentious cases can yield radically different conclusions. And where two judgements are brought into conflict, the choice of which one to maintain is largely subjective. Theorists also disagree on whether different "common sense" reactions to similar cases express "morally relevant" distinctions between the cases, or simply inconsistencies. They

disagree on what people's "considered convictions" are, and how important each particular conviction is. And often, they rely on "considered convictions" about unlikely, hypothetical cases which the reader is unlikely to have thought about before.

The entire method of deriving theories from everyday beliefs is challenged by critical theorists. For example, Bhabha believes there are complex *che vuoi* mechanisms involved in the formation of everyday beliefs. He believes that affects such as anxiety and paranoia play important roles in the formation of everyday morality. "Common sense" is not self-present or rational. It has invisible forces hidden behind it. And it's the theorist's job to excavate these. Theorists as diverse as Deleuze, Stirner, Marx, Žižek, Derrida, Gramsci, Spivak, and Butler would agree with this general line of critique. They might not agree with the specific mechanisms Bhabha identifies. But they agree with the general project of criticising "common sense" beliefs. This leads to a very different approach to everyday beliefs.

This disagreement leads to radically different approaches to particular concrete beliefs. For example, most Americans condemn suicide bombings which kill innocent civilians, even as a means to a justified end. But they accept military tactics which kill innocent civilians as a predictable side-effect, such as

bombing enemy forces in densely populated residential areas. Analytical liberal philosopher Warren Quinn (1989a, 1989b) maintains that this shows people draw a powerful moral distinction between harming someone as a means to an end and harming someone as an unwanted side-effect of another action. And he uses this distinction to derive other principles of just warfare. On the other hand, most critical theorists would classify the underlying distinction as a type of racist or cultural bias. There isn't a justifiable, logical reason to accept civilian deaths in the

west's wars, while condemning suicide bombings. Maybe people are psychoanalytically invested in the narrative of western heroes fighting barbarians in dark corners of the earth (see Razack, 2004). Or maybe they are influenced by uneven media coverage and the relative invisibility of civilian deaths (see Shaw, 2007; Chouliaraki, 2006). Maybe there's a hierarchy of which lives are taken to matter. Maybe westerners are more prone to reject tactics they're more likely to be victims of, and accept those they aren't. Maybe they are often affected by irrational feelings of anger, vengeance, and righteous outrage which justify or mitigate their own "side's" atrocities. Maybe such distinctions are based exclusively on the ingroup's experiences, because the "considered convictions" of the national ingroup are not related to those of the outgroup against which it wages war (c.f. Benhabib, 1992). From a critical perspective, analytical political philosophy looks suspiciously like rationalisation of existing biases. In addition, critical theorists have a strong awareness that everyday beliefs are contradictory, and that they change over time. The way analytical and critical theories treat the same issue is thus very different.

Rawls articulated a particular liberal theory known as “justice as fairness”. This is based on a thought-experiment known as the “original position”. In this fictional scenario, a set of imaginary people, known as the “parties”, are imagined to meet behind a “veil of ignorance”. They have no knowledge of their traits (or the traits of the people they represent) except for a few basic details about their moral personality, the basic structure of society, and facts about society in general. Their job is to decide a set of moral and political principles for the society they (or the people they represent) belong to. They are assumed to be rational individuals in the neoclassical sense (see above, 628-30). Therefore, even though they are fictional people, the decisions they would make can be

logically deduced. Rawls thinks we can figure out what they would decide. The "original position" thought-experiment is meant to provide a way of assessing institutions and policies independently of real people's real biases and interests. For example, something agreed in the original position can't be racist, because the parties don't know what race they are. They have no interest in favouring one race over another. The only circumstance where they'd endorse a racist policy is if it was in the general interest of everyone, including the underprivileged race. The original position is sometimes misunderstood as Rawls's view of people's real nature. It is clearly derived from an earlier approach known as "social contract theory". Early modern writers such as Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau sought to derive the legitimacy of particular social systems from an original contract signed by their members. People started out as independent individuals, and then signed a contract and formed a society. There is some debate over whether these theorists believe the founding contract really took place, or whether it's a thought experiment like Rawls's. But Rawls explicitly refuses to make any claim that the original position ever existed. He doesn't take it as a real situation involving real people. It's a thought experiment designed to test different moral theories.

Rawls uses the original position as a way to model what he calls "moral personality". He excludes from the parties' knowledge anything which would not be a morally valid reason to choose a particular order. And he does not assume that the parties have any particular morality of their own. They are literally just making a rational agreement based on the knowledge they hold. But, knowledge which leads to immoral biases is excluded. This is meant to ensure that the parties arrive rationally at the same conclusions real people arrive at for moral reasons. The original position models moral personality. It creates a situation which derives moral conclusions from rational decisions constrained by the elimination of morally irrelevant knowledge.

But Rawls assumes that real people also have moral personality. One's moral personality allows one to act in a moral way in spite of personal biases. The ideal of the person plays a very important role in his theory. Only "moral persons" have moral value in Rawls's theory. And the "moral person" is an abstraction. A moral person has a set of predefined traits. They are rational, reasonable, free, equal, and capable of social cooperation on a reciprocal basis. They will prefer more rather than less of a particular set of "primary goods", including income and wealth. Real people are assumed to have these traits. If they don't (for instance, because they don't have self-control or hold "unreasonable" beliefs), Rawls thinks they have no moral value. Their desires, needs, interests and capabilities don't matter. Rawls is also very clear on the point that, in public life (though not anywhere else), justice trumps other values. In the original edition of *A Theory of Justice*, Rawls made a lot of metaphysical claims about the primacy of moral personality. But he later eliminated these claims in light of the communitarian critique. His later justifications rest on his claim to provide a political conception suitable for American democracy and his ability to model "our considered convictions".

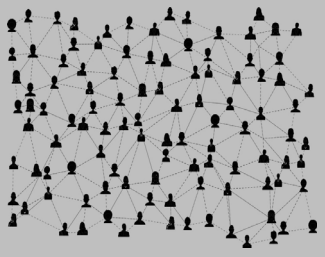
The main role of the idea of moral personality is to separate the core moral person who has a right to be treated fairly from people's actual desires and connections. Rawls includes here, not only the things people happen to want or need, but also

their social connections and commitments, and their positionalities. He also rules out "conceptions of the good" and "comprehensive doctrines". In other words, the parties don't know what religion and political position (if any) they hold, or what they see as the goal of a well-lived life. They don't have this in common and can't reason from it. They don't experience altruism or compassion. They're pared back to being rational individuals, who are deciding how to organise their self-interested, cooperative relationships. In practice, this reflects Rawls's belief that liberal citizens have to coexist in a society with others who have radically different conceptions of the good. Their cooperation has to be based on the moral personality they have in common, not on ideas of the good they disagree about.

The way Rawls deals with this in practice is the idea of "responsibility for ends". All conceptions of the good are treated as equivalent to bundles of resources claimed by individuals. Individuals are responsible for achieving or not achieving these goods, with their own resources. They can't expect other individuals or the state to provide for them. And they can't make claims in the public realm (say, as political parties or in court cases) based on them. They can't, for instance, claim that they should be fed because they're hungry, that they have to be allowed to climb mountains because it's their calling in life, or that their religion should be enforced or subsidised by the state, because it's the path to salvation or because they passionately believe in it. Other people aren't under any obligation to care about what they want or need. If they advance any of these claims, they're being selfish and demanding more than their fair share. This seems a strange way to think about (say) environmentalism or socialism. There's actual cases of Rawlsians arguing that people holding these views are 'selfish to demand' more than capitalism will give them (Kymlicka, 1989:888), even though these worldviews are anything but selfish! But it reflects longstanding liberal ways of dealing with issues such as religious controversy. When Bhabha says that Rawls can handle diversity but not difference, this may be what he has in mind.

It's a matter of debate whether Rawls's theory of moral personality requires a "liberal" ontology in the sense posited by Bhabha or Žižek, or the "unencumbered self" referred to in the communitarian critique. Rawls is very clear that people are not really like the parties in the original position. Real people have desires, motives, social commitments, positionalities and so on. However, Rawls derives his theory from the political or moral primacy of moral personality over these other features of real people. It's the moral personality which matters morally. And Rawls's view of moral personality is a direct descendant of Kant's. It implies that there's a part of the self which is separate from and superior to its socially-constructed or psychological desires, identities and so on. It's unclear if this part of the self is meant to empirically exist or if it's just a useful abstraction.

In Kant, it has a clear metaphysical status. But Rawls treats it more like a cybernetic profile, similar to those used in rational choice theory. People are to act as if they and others are moral persons, whether they are or not. People are to act as if society is a system of fair cooperation, whether it is or not. These models, derived from abstract theory, will then generate actual social relations. People are to be "treated as" persons of a certain type. This doesn't necessarily mean they actually are like this. But they are modelled as being like this. The model or assumption then governs their actual relationships. This is similar to Baudrillardian ideas of simulation, and cybernetics more broadly (see above, 659-72). The model or abstraction precedes the social relations which are generated from it. People are modelled and thus treated in particular predefined ways.



Based on the rational modelling of the decisions of the parties in the original position, Rawls derives a set of three principles. These principles are meant to rule out interpersonal oppression. Firstly, there ought to be democratic political institutions in the American sense. Secondly, there should be equality of opportunity, or meritocracy. And thirdly, inequalities should be permitted only if they benefit the worst-off. The third principle, known as the "difference principle", is Rawls's main innovation. It is also known as the "maximin" principle – the idea of maximising the minimum available to the worst-off. Society is seen as a system of cooperation for mutual benefit. According to Rawls, people working together can produce more than each of the people working on their own. This means there's a kind of socially generated surplus which belongs to nobody in particular. "Distributive justice" is the question of how this surplus should be distributed. For Rawls, the surplus should be distributed to help the

worse-off. But it should also allow plenty of space for neoclassical economic motivations.

Although this seems a fairly progressive approach, there's a lot of problems with it. Rawls separates ideas like "freedom" and "equality" from concrete referents. It's the abstract moral self, not actual people, who are rendered "free and equal". Often, this means real people end up unfree and unequal. They are better treated, the closer they approximate to the ideal. Rawls's theory of reciprocity involves petty malice or disregard towards people deemed "not to be contributing". It's an axiom of his theory that people who don't cooperate get nothing. "Responsibility for ends" is arguably unreasonable to people who don't value basic goods and to people with extensive unmet needs. A lot of people are excluded because their unusual needs or desires don't register in the abstract model. And despite its apparent liberalism, Rawls's theory actually places a high value on political stability and order. He accepts a basically Hobbesian view where a lack of social order is worse than any possible order. In some cases, order even trumps the first principle of justice. So it might be better to think of stability or order as Rawls's first principle, and the explicit principles as second, third and fourth. Some of Rawls's positions are extremely conservative when compared to those of socialists, social-democrats, or radical theorists. For example, he only endorses civil disobedience under very narrow conditions, he dislikes redistributive taxation, and he advocates open-ended "enabling" powers allowing states to preserve stability by exceptional means.

Rawls also seeks to justify some degree of social inequality (scholars disagree as to how much). Unusually, he justifies it by reference to the interests of the worst-off. Rawls accepts the standard neoclassical account of motivation. He believes that incentives encourage rich people to act in pro-social ways. So some level of inequality is justified in order to provide incentives. Rawls mostly opposes redistribution of wealth. He believes in the neoliberal idea of "trickledown", the idea that the enrichment of the rich will produce wealth which trickles down to everyone else. And in practice, he doesn't give the worse-off any way to veto decisions which reduce their

social minimum. The vital decisions are made by technocrats who decide what they think the worst-off should accept, often based on counterfactuals and guesswork. Or they arise from democratic elections in which the worst-off are outnumbered. Rawls's theory has features of Third Way and post-Washington Consensus approaches and of the 'politics of perversion' (see above, 386-91, 640-1). He provides abstract principles which are hard to apply. These principles are meant to reconcile social antagonisms. But anyone who falls outside this imposed consensus is declared "unreasonable". Unreasonable positions can be ignored and, if they become socially disruptive, suppressed. Even if people agree on the consensus principles, antagonism is simply displaced to their interpretation. Nobody knows how much inequality maximises the position of the worst-off. And it's very easy to dress up claims which violate the Rawlsian principles as claims which do not. One sees here the standard "perverse" dynamics of consensus-by-diktat and rhetorical vagueness.

Rawls effectively created a new paradigm for how political philosophy is done. This created an endless field of debates which has attracted large numbers of philosophers. Part of the reason for this is that his method is simple, but easily modified. Small tweaks in the design of the original position (or its equivalent in other theories) lead to massive differences in the resultant principles. Social "common sense" is neither internally coherent nor consistent across individuals. Theories will vary a lot depending which snippets of "common sense" are taken as fixed points and which are treated as dispensable. Rawls's parties also know certain basic "facts" about social life. Rawls takes these facts as uncontentious, and excludes other factual claims from the social sciences as contentious. But these "facts" tend to rig his conclusions. For example, he assumes people belong to a "society" which is roughly speaking a nation-state, rather than a globalised

economy or a world-system. He admits assumptions derived from neoclassical economics, but not assumptions derived from sociological research, or those of Marxist or feminist economics. He lets the parties know that the people they represent will respond to incentives and want more income and wealth, but not that they need to eat or that they probably belong to families. Altering these "factual" selections also produces radical differences in the conclusions a theorist reaches. So other theorists can simply redesign the starting-point to justify radically different conclusions.

Most post-Rawlsian analytical political philosophers use varieties of the "original position" thought-experiment. They don't necessarily model it in terms of parties agreeing to a social order. But they adopt some version of the idea a neutral observer unaffected by real-world biases. They all accept aspects of existing common sense or "considered convictions" as a basis for morality. They all seek to systematise these existing beliefs. Most of them incorporate neoclassical economic assumptions. However, some also introduce variations which produce a wide range of political positions – from communism to economic libertarianism. Rawls largely restricts his theory to distributions within a nation-state. Theorists like Pogge believe that nationality is an arbitrary trait which would be excluded from the original position, along with race and gender. Pogge and other "cosmopolitan liberals" believe in an international version of distributive justice. Pogge argues from the common belief that people are more responsible for things they cause than things they don't, to argue that westerners are often more responsible for alleviating "Third World" poverty than to relieve poverty within the west. Ronald Dworkin formulates a theory similar to Rawls's, but with a different type of original position and a stronger emphasis on equality of opportunity. According to Dworkin, people shouldn't lose out because they're born with traits which make them less socially successful.

Feminists like Susan Moller Okin use Rawls's theory to argue for gender equality. Since the parties don't know their gender, Okin thinks they would support liberal feminist policies. For example, women who divorce should be compensated for income they didn't make if they left work to care for children. Nozick, who is a hardcore neoliberal, opposes the very idea of distributive justice. In his version of the original situation, everything is always a product of someone's particular labour and of fair transactions arising from this. Anything arising from these free actions is just. There's no social surplus to distribute. Cohen, a Marxist critic of Rawls, believes that the parties would not agree to any social inequality at all. If they decided to work together for mutual advantage, they wouldn't also demand incentives and inequality as a reason to work. Van Parijs believes that the parties would agree to a universal basic income. They would realise that the people they represent might turn out to be slackers instead of hard-workers. The differences among the theories basically come down to which traits and forms of knowledge are permitted in the original position.

In all these cases, the disagreements are premised on small differences in the original position or the selection of particular "considered convictions" as fixed points. For example, the main difference between Rawls and Cohen is that Rawls treats neoclassical economic motivations as a neutral fact. Cohen treats the desire for incentives as a morally-relevant issue of personal motivation. Okin reaches feminist conclusions because she permits knowledge of sociological evidence about gender equality which Rawls would rule out. And Nozick's original parties are in a situation of individual labour at the time of first contact, rather than already in a social structure as they are for Rawls. Given the nature of the method, it seems impossible to resolve these differences.

So where does Bhabha's critique fit in? As we've seen, Bhabha places a great emphasis both on positionality (above, 139-50) and on co-constitutivity (above, 119-20). The Rawlsian or post-Rawlsian procedure does not have space for these. Rawls does not permit knowledge of social groups in the original position. Nor do most of his successors and rivals. Rawls treats the parties as basically the same. He therefore models moral interaction among real people on the basis that we are, in a certain minimal sense, the same. He assumes particular traits which everyone (or everyone worth representing) has in common. And Rawls's parties do not have psychoanalytic subjectivities. They are not co-constituted and they do not experience "fantasy" or affect. These aspects of life will be left out of the principles they arrive at. They will thus arrive at principles which can't handle the reality of cultural difference, in the sense of co-constitution (see Chapter 9).

For theorists like Bhabha, different identities are incommensurable. There's no way they can be reduced to unity by abstracting away knowledge of which position one occupies. The very idea that it's possible to formulate and speak from an objective position above and outside social positionalities is anathema to Bhabha. It's the height of arrogance and narcissism. Identity can't exist without its Other. The supposedly objective point of view must therefore depend on a constitutive exclusion (see above, Chapter 2 and 357-64). Indeed, Bhabha directly criticises this idea in the work of a historical liberal writer, John Stuart Mill (LC, 23-4). For Bhabha, the 'subject of representation' cannot be singular, transparent, or 'reasonable'. It has to be "split" into self and other.

Bhabha would probably also suggest that Rawls's parties already have traits which mark them as western. For example, the very fact that they are economically rational subjects puts them on the western side of the colonial binary (c.f. Rew and Khan, 2006; Spivak, 1985). Also, the parties expect that everyone will be members of a single society who take part in this society's

economy over their complete life. But this means they can't represent migrants, or minorities affected by unemployment and secondary labour markets, or people in neocolonial situations who are exploited in global (not national) production chains. It involves an assumption that nation-states are largely self-contained economic units, rather than parts of an interdependent world-system. And the relevant "considered convictions" are those of middle-class white American liberals, not colonised or marginalised peoples. Even if Rawlsians think they're modelling common sense assumptions everyone shares, they don't have to do the research to back it up. They pass off their own, particular, socially situated point of view as a neutral, objective point of view and dismiss other viewpoints as unreasonable.

This is the line of argument pursued by people like Seyla Benhabib (1992), Iris Marion Young (1990), Steven Lukes (1974), and Carol Gilligan (1982). They argue that the parties in the original position actually have gendered and racialised traits. For instance, their preference for justice over care suggests they have a "male" way of seeing. But other feminists and anti-racists, like

Okin and Amartya Sen, try to use the Rawlsian approach to argue for their own point of view. It's relatively easy to introduce attributes or sociological claims which would produce anti-racist and feminist positions from a scenario like the "original position". If the parties believed that people are co-constituted by identity binaries, how would this affect their reasoning? Perhaps they would arrive at a “right to narrate” similar to Bhabha's. But it seems impossible to reconstruct the situation so as to incorporate co-constitution and incommensurability. Under what circumstances might the parties agree to a Levinasian ethics? They would need to have a strong degree of uncertainty, but also a sense of irreducible togetherness. It isn't easy to model this.

Although Bhabha is critical of post-Rawlsian liberalism, he also has good things to say about the work of Amartya Sen. Sen is a mainstream economist trained in neoclassical economics. Like Rawls, he incorporates neoclassical assumptions in his political theory, and he uses a version of the original position (in his case, an impartial spectator's judgement). His version of liberalism focuses on "positive freedom", or the ability to do things. Abstract rights are useless unless people have the capacity to exercise their rights. People need particular kinds of social provision to exercise rights in practice. For instance, people need transport infrastructure to exercise a right to travel, and education to make informed use of the right to vote. On this basis, he argues for a "right to development". People should view development as a basic rights issue. However, development should not just be seen in terms of GDP. Development is about increasing people's positive freedom. It includes political freedom, economic growth, social opportunities, and security. Sen believes these different aspects of development all reinforce one another. He is particularly concerned about basic welfare, educational opportunities, poverty rates, and gender inequality. In many ways, this prefigures the post-Washington Consensus agenda (see above, 639-40).

The main challenge to liberalism within Anglo-American philosophy is communitarianism. Communitarians believe that people's social personality is largely shaped by their social interactions. These interactions mainly take place within communities with definite moral values. Communitarians mostly think that communities are more important than individuals. They idealise ancient Greece, Renaissance-era republics, and early white American settlements. They believe that pre-personal, ascriptive attachments are definitive of what people are. They are of such overwhelming importance to a well-lived life that they can trump individual freedom. They generally believe that people belong to traditions or "forms of life" which define particular communities. Ethical values and desires can never escape from their basis in these primal forms of life.

Communitarians see today's America as too procedural, legalistic, and rights-based. They long for tight-knit, homogeneous communities which set moral values for their members and create a sense of purpose in life. They dislike big, technocratic institutions and mass consumerism. Politically, communitarians can be socialists or conservatives. However, their position on social issues tends to be morally authoritarian. They're fine with banning things the majority disapproves of, like gambling, or public nudity. The idea of social capital is sometimes seen as part of communitarianism. Communitarians disagree with Rawls that people should relate as citizens in a way which brackets out their conceptions of the good. They are often happy for states and communities to pursue collective conceptions of the good. Some of them believe that political participation is a necessary part of the good life for everyone. People shouldn't be able to withdraw from public life into private consumption.

Michael Sandel formulated the most influential communitarian critique of Rawls. Rawls separates the right (what is morally just) from the good (the ends people pursue). He thinks this allows coexistence among people with different belief-systems. But Sandel doesn't see why imposing a conception of the right is any less oppressive than imposing a conception of the good. In fact, he thinks Rawls covertly imposes a particular view of the subject. He imposes a conception of the good without admitting it. People have to see themselves as moral persons and embrace justice as the "first virtue" to accept Rawls's theory. This means they have to prioritise moral personality in their conception of the good.

Sandel's main criticism is that Rawls believes in an "unencumbered self". Sandel thinks Rawls believes people are separate individuals who aren't connected by moral commitments. They aren't necessarily members of families or communities. But in reality, people are members of families and communities before they come to think of themselves as moral selves. Moral values make

no sense outside a community context. Also, people with no final ends would not be able to arrive at principles of justice. Reasoning without an end can produce no conclusion because reasoning is always instrumental. And, according to Sandel, people who adopt Rawls's position would not feel any moral tie towards one another. They would not have the "civic virtue" necessary to cooperate as a society. They're likely to prefer individual consumption over social duty. This is because they're utility maximisers. And they're utility maximisers because Rawls incorporates neoclassical economics. But utility maximisers who focus on individual consumption will not have a sense of justice.

Sandel partly misreads Rawls. Rawls realises that real people have family and community commitments. He also insists that his theory has no particular metaphysical basis. It can be embraced by what he calls an "overlapping consensus" of different views. For example, a Christian who accepts the idea of "free faith" can embrace Rawls's theory, without believing in unencumbered selves. People don't have to subjectively believe in unencumbered selves to interact based on Rawls's principles of justice. But in a way, Sandel is striking at the heart of Rawls's ontology. Sandel objects to the idea that a pre-social moral personality is the only thing that matters. And, Rawls definitely builds the idea of an objective observer into his model of the original position. The argument against unencumbered selves echoes the social constructivist critique of liberalism. It's a bit like Bhabha's insistence that subjectivity is an effect of social construction (see Chapter 2). But communitarians emphasise construction based on a common tradition, cooperative interactions, and inclusion in a social whole. Bhabha focuses on the production of subjectivity through self/other differentiation.

Charles Taylor makes another important argument against liberalism, arguing for positive liberty. The distinction between positive and negative liberty comes from Isaiah Berlin. Negative liberty is freedom from outer coercion, whereas positive liberty is freedom to do certain things. The usefulness of the distinction is debated. Berlin associated negative liberty with liberalism and positive liberty with Marxism and totalitarianism. He argued for negative liberty. Taylor argues that a viable view of liberty has to be an "exercise" view. It has to involve the ability to exercise a liberty rather than just an opportunity to do so. On an exercise view, freedom means being in control of one's life. Freedom means "self-determination". Taylor tries to establish that this is the usual American common sense view, based on everyday examples where people supposedly don't conflate blocked opportunities with lack of freedom. A negative view of liberty can be rendered compatible with an exercise view, but it's a lot easier to adopt a positive view instead.

For Taylor, there are higher and lower goals, or ends, which people pursue. It's the higher ends which matter politically. Control of one's life also requires input into collective processes which influence one's life. Taylor believes there can be "internal fetters" on freedom, as well as external constraints. Things like false consciousness, addictions, and lack of self-control might interfere with freedom to pursue one's highest goals. Taylor thinks it's fine for social majorities to prohibit things which are internal fetters to higher goals. Minority goals which don't accord with these socially-defined higher goals are simply incorrect. Like Rawls, Taylor argues for this view by arguing that it is the best fit with common sense intuitions.

There are a number of other communitarian writers. For instance, Michael Walzer argues that moral values must be rooted in the values of particular communities. He argues for a kind of qualified egalitarianism and for limiting the social power of money. He also opposes the idea that justice can apply outside a particular community. Toleration is only possible when different

groups have become part of a single community. Alastair McIntyre tries to revive Aristotle's virtue ethics as an alternative to liberalism. In virtue ethics, being a good person means showing the right virtues, not following rules or generating good consequences. Resultant 'goods of excellence' matter more than material goods. However, McIntyre also thinks that virtues are relative to particular social practices. He argues that people necessarily depend on others to survive. Vulnerability is a basic condition of life. Therefore, people need to learn virtues which respond to vulnerability in themselves and others. This is similar to the ideas of some identity-based theorists such as Judith Butler. For another communitarian, David Miller (2000), national identity is vital because it provides common loyalty and trust that others will reciprocate cooperative behaviour. In other words, it's vital in order to create social capital. Without this, there can't be social life. Obligations to co-nationals therefore trump other obligations.

In general, communitarianism has authoritarian effects. Communitarianism requires much higher levels of personal integration into social-level ideologies and practices than liberalism does. This makes it very dangerous to eccentrics and minorities. Liberals believe that modern societies are too diverse for communitarianism to work. People radically disagree about conceptions of the good. For example, America is split down the middle between conservative Christians and secular liberals. A communitarian regime would either have to be a dictatorship of one group over the other, or would lack social cooperation entirely. Critics say that communitarians 'want us to live in Salem' (Gutmann, 1985:319). They're referring to a tight-knit American settler town where a large number of non-conformist women were executed for supposed witchcraft. Communitarians seem to think they can have Salem without the witch-hunts. Some Third Way politicians such as Tony Blair have expressed sympathies for

communitarianism. It was useful for them as a way to justify destroying civil rights. The pursuit of social cohesion by raising social capital often leads to intolerance for nuisance and minor deviance, and harsh practices of social exclusion. The warnings about Salem and witches have proven accurate, except that now, the witches are immigrants, "anti-social" youths, "extremists", and other folk devils.

Bhabha is right that the kinds of people communitarianism posits are limited to socially included groups. They are shaped by strong moral communities. The disjunctive experiences of minority and migrant status are incompatible with communitarian ideals. However, this is not necessarily an objection to communitarianism. Communitarians also recognise that most modern people do not belong to strong moral communities, and see this as a problem. The point is not that everyone already belongs to moral communities, but that this is how people *should* live. Migrants frequently move because existing communities are disrupted by capitalism or war. Communitarians would probably argue that disruption of stable communities is undesirable. However, the communitarian view of community also precludes co-constitutivity. Communitarians define communities in terms of "shared" values and interactions. This is very different from the idea that identities are defined by antagonistic relationships. The issue of primordial tradition versus antagonistic co-constitutivity as the main source of social construction is the biggest theoretical disagreement between Bhabha and communitarianism.

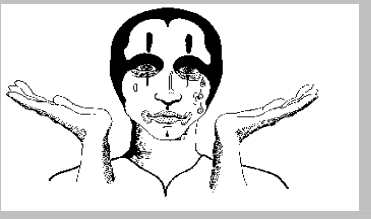
Jürgen Habermas, another theorist mentioned by Bhabha, is not an Anglo-American-style analytical liberal. But he is largely sympathetic with liberal politics. He is a descendant of the Frankfurt School tradition of neo-Marxist critique. He believes that modern institutions contain liberatory potential. They can enhance people's capacities for freedom, self-determination, and reason. But this potential is undermined by the dominance of "instrumental rationality", or means-ends

reasoning. Habermas tends to be critical of capitalism, technocracy and bureaucracy. What's special about modernity is the rise of a public sphere or civil society which is not under state control. However, the public sphere is now decaying because of things like consumerism, mass media, and the welfare state. Habermas wants to recover the good side of modernity to offset its bad side.

Habermas believes that rationality is a feature of communication among people. It is not a feature of the universe or of thought. All speech-acts aim towards universal mutual understanding. He wants life to be more participatory. Big bureaucratic institutions should be scaled back. People should govern themselves through participatory "deliberative democracy". This is a system where public discussion or "deliberation" is more important than majority voting. He seeks to shift power from technocratic "systems" to everyday "lifeworlds" based on consensus. According to Habermas, a just social order arises from an "ideal speech situation". This is a situation where everyone has the same ability to speak and nobody has false consciousness. Truth is defined as whatever people would agree in an ideal speech situation. Whether we can reach an ideal speech situation or not, we can at least work towards it. The ideal speech situation is a bit like a speculative future version of Rawls's original position. However, Habermas requires a lot more real dialogue than Rawls does.

Habermas had a series of disagreements with poststructuralists because of their critiques of modernity. One of his accusations is "cryptonormativism" (1987:275-6). This means that, according to Habermas, poststructuralists hold concealed normative beliefs. Their work is animated by ethical commitments. But poststructuralists hide these commitments from their readers. They pose as relativists when they aren't. He makes this criticism against Foucault in particular. Habermas suggests that Foucault constantly makes claims which look like value-neutral positivist statements of fact. But he uses these claims in a way which gives them normative force. He provides descriptions from a present point of

present point of view, which carry hidden normative implications. According to Foucault's philosophy, everything's a power move and his own writings are just as power-drenched as everything else. He's a relativist. But when he writes, he implies that his point of view is better than others. He keeps taking part in a type of normative knowledge-claim which strictly speaking he rejects. This leads to an inferior type of normative theory. This theory puts forward partisan claims but provides no grounds for these claims. It makes truth-claims while at the same time destroying the basis for these claims.



This leads to "performative contradiction". In other words, Foucault does things in practice which contradict what he says. The claim of cryptonormativism seems very relevant to Bhabha. Bhabha often mixes up engaged, polemical commitment with dispassionate, relativistic description in a way which conceals his normative commitments. This emerges particularly in his contradictory stance towards antagonism and binaries (see above, 251-8, 264-8). Bhabha also seems to believe, for instance, that accepting co-constitutivity is better than disavowing it. He believes that subverting dominant regimes is a good thing, and achieving voice for marginalised groups is a good thing. But he can't provide any basis for these views. He has a consistent ethical commitment to opposing and subverting colonialism and racism. But there's no real ground for this commitment.

CHAPTER 14

Bhabha and Political Theory 2:
Marxism and Other Radicalisms

As we have seen, Bhabha describes antagonistic radical approaches as not 'worth having much truck with' (TT, 116). This is honest to the extent that he rarely attempts to engage respectfully with such approaches. He does not even try to deconstruct their discourses with the precision he uses with colonial texts. In practice, however, Bhabha does have quite a bit of 'truck' with radical approaches – but generally in a very hostile way. His objections to antagonistic discourse and binaries do not seem to apply to his engagements with Marxism, militant anti-racism, and anti-colonialism (c.f. above, 251-8, 264-8, 386-91). This stands in sharp contrast with his 'strategic' engagement with colonial, capitalist, and liberal texts. Whereas liberalism and colonialism are to be carefully read, appreciated for their ambiguities, and mined for rare gems of progressive insight, radical theories are simply rejected in a tide of opprobrium and name-calling. While the supposed motivation may well be strategic (liberalism and colonialism earn their right to Bhabha's 'truck' through their power, not their truth or their radicalism), the resultant stance positions Bhabha as a mimic and critic *inside* dominant ideologies, and an ally of these ideologies in their attacks on anything radically opposed to them. The impression is unavoidable that Bhabha objects more to Marxism than to neoliberalism.

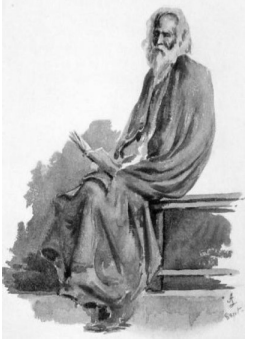
In many cases, Bhabha simply ignores critics. In an interview, Shang Aifeng challenges Bhabha head-on about Aijaz Ahmad's critique. This is one of a number of Marxist-inflected critiques of Bhabha. Bhabha claims that he has 'not even read much of it' (MGM, 174). He claims to feel 'humble', 'grateful' and 'modest' that people have read his work (MGM, 174). This sounds suspiciously like disavowal: modesty and humility are the opposite of the usual affects generated by critical or commercial success. Most people experience this as an ego-boost. And Bhabha often speaks in a way suggestive of superiority. He then divides criticisms into 'productive' and 'unproductive' (MGM, 174). This is a common enough distinction. But Bhabha gives it a particular meaning. A criticism is unproductive the person wants to 'destroy other people' (MGM, 174) or if it is focused on 'my status or who I am' (MGM, 175). He refuses to engage with such critiques because 'it can distract you from your own work' (MGM 175). He says that he was once asked by a student to respond to a critique. His answer was: 'Why should I respond to you? You have chosen to write an article that is critical of me. Good. Please do it and let the readers decide. But this doesn't mean that now I have to spend time writing about you - why should I do that?' (MGM, 175). In other words, if Bhabha detects aggression in a critique, he ignores it. He perceives any response as a waste of his precious time, and as giving time to the other, unimportant person. He also suggests, in principle, that one can demand that others not 'misrepresent' one's works (MGM, 174) - despite apparently failing to stick to this criterion himself.

This might be reasonable if Bhabha ignored name-calling or responses by random bloggers. But he is here responding to other scholars offering informed critiques of his work. The very act of framing such critiques as mere attempts to 'destroy' him, with no merits regarding his position, is itself a hostile counter-criticism. Conveniently, this allows him to ignore the most incisive critiques because they are made in a polemical mode. As we have seen, Bhabha has a double standard regarding aggression (see above, 274-6). One

should also consider that he believes that linguistic moves are primarily about self-positioning and status (see above, 139-50), so that rejecting criticisms because they target his status is contradictory. His position here also contradicts his posited right to narrate and to be heard (see below, 945-961). He seems to conveniently consider any Marxist or materialist critique as 'unproductive'. This may be because he is uninterested in the ways it challenges his assumptions. Or it may be because Marxists tend to use a polemical tone (which, given the dialectical assumptions of Marxism, is not necessarily an indication of nihilistic destructiveness). Either way, the net effect is to allow Bhabha to simply ignore extensive critiques which expose serious flaws in his position.

The crucial point, however, is that it is a standard academic norm that academics should respond to criticisms which challenge a position. This based on the operation of academic disciplines as communities of meaning (see Kuhn, 1962). However, it also relies on the idea that scholars in an area are talking about a common object. Each scholar makes truth-claims about the object. A critique is a demand on an author. It demands that the author either accept they have been rebutted, modify their theory to defuse the challenge, defend their theory with better arguments or evidence which defuse the challenge, or else appear to the audience to have been rebutted. Regardless of whether truth or objects exist, the academic 'game' relies on the availability of this 'move'. When a more powerful author sidesteps this demand, using their status to insulate themselves from criticism, it allows them to continue to perpetuate the hegemony of ideas which are not epistemically viable, and yet are politically powerful.

Indeed, it is noticeable that it is usually the *more powerful* actors - such as neoclassical economists - who ignore rather than engage with opponents, thus creating an illusion that they have not been rebutted. Southern governments often receive free journals from organisations like the IMF which include exclusively neoclassical articles. This gives a misleading impression that Marxist, Keynesian, ecological, developmentalist, and other critical approaches either do not exist or have been decisively rebutted. Local officials believe they are reading and applying the best available academic knowledge. But this misleading appearance derives from the organisation's power and reach, not the strength of its arguments (Gore, 2000). This is also how Orientalists avoided engagement with social and historical aspects of colonised societies (see Saïd, 1978). Bhabha is thus copying an abusive tactic common among the most powerful. In his case as in theirs, this is an injustice to people holding a politically weaker perspective which offers a decisive critique. A scholar may owe another scholar a response as a recognition of their status as a scholar. But the more crucial point is that the critique is not primarily about the relation among scholars. It is about the *claims* made by an author, and whether they are valid or not. If different scholars simply ignore each other's work, there are simply multiple juxtaposed perspectives which do not relate to each other. These perspectives may continue to function based on assumptions which have been falsified elsewhere. In his refusal to engage with opponents, Bhabha also replicates the power of neoliberalism. According to Berardi, this kind of elision of adversaries – treating them as irrelevant – is central to cybernetic power (2016:203-4; see above, 659-72).



However, Bhabha does not see theory as making claims about objects, nor as a relation among subjects. He sees it as in cybernetic terms, as a process of functional modification (see above, 659-72), or as a power-play to shift others' positions using subversion (see above, 139-50, 212-19). He sidesteps any of the four consequences of critique, either by ignoring the critic, or by misrepresenting their position and relying on rhetorical moves to insulate his own. And he relies on his status, visibility, positionality and network position to avoid his failures to rebut critics leading to appearances that he has been rebutted. He thus renders himself, in effect, immune to criticism. This is consistent, in general, with his use of concealed trunks (see above, 251-8, 264-8) and his passive-aggressive politics of perversion (see above, 386-91). Crucially, it allows a powerful figure like Bhabha to ignore critics with lower social reach. He acts as a poet-priest who does not have to engage with the writings of lesser mortals, particularly if they threaten to 'destroy' his position of superiority. The illusion that he is a subaltern writer, protecting himself from accountability to colonial critiques (see Chakrabarti, 2012), is probably why radicals accept this authoritarian move (which is very common among identity-political scholars today). Ultimately, however, it expresses the motivated arrogance of intellectual elites through time, lightly disguised as autonomy in whether to respond, distributive justice of emotional labour, and not feeding the trolls.

As we shall see, when he engages at all, Bhabha tends to denounce rather than rebut opponents. His denunciations rest on the use of analytical labels or tendentious secondary readings to silence the opponent's perspective. Such readings depend on the prior truth of Bhabha's position, which they presuppose in a circular fashion. A particularly objectionable aspect of his polemical method is his propensity to stack up negatively-loaded 'boo-words' in densely packed sentences which thereby accumulate negative affective force. Rhetorically, this is similar to the antagonistic approaches Bhabha supposedly rejects. Like orthodox Marxists and the far-right (see Innuendo Studios, 2019), Bhabha finds ways to put opponents in his pre-existing boxes. By putting them in a box, he no longer has to engage with their specific arguments. In principle, Bhabha suggests an

obligation to justly represent others' views in such a way that 'opponents recognize that their views have been fairly represented and evaluated even when they are witheringly questioned or opposed'. Convergence of views is to be 'process-driven' based on 'interpersonal good practice (RCA, 23). A noble ideal, perhaps, but not one Bhabha holds to in practice.

His anathemas can include several types of negative term. Some are clinical terms from psychology and psychoanalysis – for example, narcissism, paranoia, disavowal, denial, foreclosure. They imply that the accused person is acting-out some kind of delusion or irrational fixation, or rejecting a true claim for psychological reasons. Bhabha is situated as a psychiatrist or psychoanalyst, and his clinical judgement serves to render the offending statement a symptom, rather than a truth-claim (c.f. Pateman, 1975). Other negative terms are political labels. For example, as discussed above, Bhabha tends to refer to positions which are based an assumption that people exist as distinct individuals, or that desire is not simply an effect of social construction and its antinomies, as 'liberal' – whether or not a theory's political conclusions concur with liberalism. Still other anathemas are moments of rhetorical flourish in which Bhabha shows off his use of language, or are theoretical sins against deconstruction (e.g. 'essentialism'). These terms are often aggregated and then juxtaposed with statements filled with words which are (from Bhabha's point of view) positively loaded. One has to be familiar with Bhabha's vocabulary to identify these clusters, as many words which are normally positively-loaded have a negative mark from Bhabha's point of view, and vice-versa.

Take for instance the following passage: 'The progressive reading is crucially determined by the adversarial or agonistic situation itself; it is effective because it uses the subversive, messy mask of camouflage and does not come like a pure avenging angel speaking the truth of a radical historicity and pure oppositionality' (LC, 25). In this statement, the 'progressive' reading is, of course, Bhabha's own; the position he rejects is either a Marxist or an anti-colonial position. In characterising the adversary, we see in close proximity the insult 'avenging angel', with its religious connotations; the boo-words 'truth' and 'pure' (twice!), and a reference to 'historicity' (implying teleological progress) and 'oppositionality' (implying inversion or antagonism) – six instances of polemical rhetoric packed into a fourteen-word clause. On Bhabha's side, we have similarly collocated the (in Bhabhba's private language) hurrah-words 'progressive', 'effective', 'agonistic', 'subversive', 'messy' and 'camouflage', along with words connoting direct self-present expression of reality itself – again tightly packed, in a dense, 25-word burst of glorifying rhetoric. Ignoring subtle differences among the terms, the reader is effectively being told: my good reading is true and good because it's good, good and good – and does not come like a bad badness speaking the badness of bad badness and bad badness. That's a lot of polemic and binaries, for someone who believes in negotiation and inbetweenness!

Beneath the rhetoric, there's the remnant of a substantive objection in this passage. Bhabha is claiming that his approach emerges within a situation of self/other antagonism, whereas Marxism (or whatever he's critiquing) seems to swoop in from outside. He's referring to the tendency – which is very real, in practice – of theorists who think they have the "correct" analysis, seeking to channel social movements and processes in line

with their approach. Think of certain socialist political parties, which get involved in pre-established campaigns, and use force of numbers or dirty tricks to claim a leadership position and capture the campaign for their own agenda. Bhabha's also arguing for 'camouflage' or ambiguity, rather than direct truth-claims.

But at a theoretical level, Bhabha is arguing with a straw-man. Like Bhabha's theory, Marxism is also elaborated from a standpoint within the 'material' process of antagonism. The main difference between the two approaches in this regard is that Bhabha never escapes the relation of self/other constitutivity, whereas Marxism elaborates a distinct perspective which leads outside it. This does not mean that it swoops in from outside (though Marxists imposing orthodox schemas or political platforms may indeed swoop in with pre-formed answers). It means that it leads out of the situation of antagonism, towards a transformed future. With his dense cluster of rhetoric, Bhabha has simply slandered an opposed position by implying that it takes a position it does not take – albeit with plausible deniability provided by the obscure langauge he uses. Through this slander, and the false binary it sustains, Bhabha thus manages to pass off his own insistence on self/other co-constitutivity as being the same thing as speaking from within a situation of antagonism – whereas any rejection of such co-constitutivity must be a purist position imposed from outside the situation. In fact, Bhabha and others relying on co-constitutivity *also* tend to swoop in with pre-formed categories which they impose as an interpretive frame on diverse situations (see above, 251-8, 264-8).

This type of manoeuvre is characteristic of much of Bhabha's work. In another passage, he posits a simplistic choice between 'occupying [the] fissures' or imposing a ready-made ideological alternative (SPD, 368). Again, he simplifies the alternatives and imposes a binary. The choice he offers is between a poststructuralist relationship to actual social forces and an artificial and authoritarian imposition of a content he assumes to be arbitrary and dogmatic. The latter is a straw-man of Marxist approaches. As we shall see again in the case of Noel Ignatiev (below, 884-7), Bhabha uses rhetoric to force the choice he offers. In other words, it is virtually impossible to see the choice in these terms, and not choose Bhabha's option. But the choice is a product of a false binarisation. There are not just two options. Many neo-Marxist approaches seek to develop new conceptions of the world *from* the fissures and contradictions of everyday beliefs, rearticulating certain aspects and dropping others. The ideological alternative is articulated on the basis of the aspects of the fissures which are not part of the dominant order. Approaches based on the 'politics of desire', such as Situationism and post-left anarchy, do not generally occupy the fissures except in a temporary, Scottian way. They seek an alternative from outside. But the 'outside' is not an ideological doctrine – it is a set of affects connected with joy, life, love, and play.

On the other hand, Bhabha's approach is not necessarily a matter of 'occupying the fissures'. It often seems like Bhabha *does* fill the fissures with his own ideological cement: Derridean or Lacanian theory. The fissures are selected, named, articulated, and valued in particular, 'ideological' ways. For example, in the case of *Fish Story* (see above, 187-8), Bhabha funnels his ready-made disjuctive theory into his reading of works of a very different ideological slant. And again, Bhabha's rhetoric is needlessly polemical and binarising – in defiance of his own injunction to use 'translational' rather than polemical speech. Similar rhetoric recurs frequently in Bhabha's responses to radical positions. It usually serves the same function: to straw-man the opposing position and knock it down in a tide of loaded language.

In the Margins: Rhetoric, Propaganda Theory, Boo-Words and Hurrah-Words

In theories of rhetoric, persuasive language is understood to have three different kinds of appeal. These are known by the Greek names ***logos***, ***ethos*** and ***pathos*** (taken from Aristotle, who wrote a classic work on rhetoric). Logos is logical argument, or an appeal to reason. It might include deductive reasoning and claims about empirical facts. Ethos is an appeal to the personal position of the writer - their expert status, their reliability and so on. Arguments from positionality might also count as ethos. Pathos is an appeal to emotions or values. Moral exhortation, scaremongering, and appeals to compassion are examples of pathos. Aristotle believed that well-constructed rhetoric usually contains all three elements. However, logos should form the core of the argument. Intelligent readers are more convinced by the logical core of the argument than its ethos or pathos. With his distaste for "modern reason", Bhabha would probably dispute this.

Loaded language is a particular type of language where pathos (emotional or moral appeal) is contained in the words themselves. The particular word carries an emotional loading (positive or negative) which is designed to inspire emotions in the reader/listener. So a statement can be made in the form of logos, but also carry pathos. For example, someone might say "Bhabha's pomo gibberish was written in the 1980s". The substance of the claim is unproblematic (Bhabha's texts were written in the 1980s). But the words chosen for the subject of the sentence convey a strong negative meaning. Such a statement is saying that Bhabha's work is undesirable and nonsensical, even though it does not directly make any such claim. Instead, the truth of the negative claim is taken for granted. Alternatively, someone might say that "Bhabha shows how white identity is

complicit in colonialism". The claim accurately represents what Bhabha says, but carries a claim at the level of pathos that he's right in what he says. At its simplest, such language might just be a way of venting emotions. And sometimes it's impossible to make a claim which isn't loaded one way or the other. But it can also be used strategically, to manipulate readers/listeners. The claims, or bias, involved in loaded language can be hidden from the audience and conveyed without critical reception. Because the claim is concealed, it sometimes escapes critical scrutiny.

Boo- and hurrah-words are particular types of loaded language, or language which is constructed to produce an emotional and not only a logical response. Boo-words are words which are always negatively loaded within a particular discourse, and hurrah-words (or hooray-words) are always positively loaded. They are signals used to call listeners to boo or cheer the speaker (or to click "like" on social media, for example). They have strong emotional connotations, but are vague or empty in their referential content. They don't seem to refer to a distinct "slice of reality", or if they do, the slice is vaguely bounded.

S.I. Hayakawa (1941), a follower of Korzybski, instead uses the terms snarl-words and purr-words. He compares these words to cats or lions snarling or purring. He considers such words to be presymbolic noises disguised as language. This is particularly the case when such terms are grouped, so that the substantive content of claims turns out to be 'What I like/hate, I like/hate very, very much'. Generally, the words refer to different sides of a conflict, and are deployed instead of reasoned argument and instead of other kinds of emotional appeal. They are often vaguely defined and lack clear parameters. As a result, they can be deployed strategically by leaders – much like Laclau and Mouffe's empty signifiers (see above, 722-7). They therefore differ from simply making a substantive claim which has a conventional moral loading attached.

In general, virtually everyone in a particular speech-community "agrees" that the hurrah-word is a good thing and the boo-word a bad thing, but they do not agree on what the words mean. Some scholars believe that such terms are actually ways to express approval (or pleasure) and disapproval (or distaste). For example, there's a theory of moral philosophy called "emotivism", which maintains that moral statements (such as "this is good") are actually ways to convey emotional states. For philosophers like A.J. Ayer, all moral words are boo- or hurrah-words. However, some loaded words (such as "communist", "murder", and various racial slurs) seem to have a minimum referential content as well as a value-judgement towards this content. They combine some degree of referential meaning with strong emotive connotations. The negative judgement of the referential content is embedded in the word. It's a grey area whether these count as boo/hurrah or purr/snarl words.

Whether the words are truly empty or not, claims involving boo- or hurrah-words are often very much contestable. It's usually impossible to prove whether the term "really" applies. Rather, its successful application depends on the reaction of the audience. For this reason, the deployment of boo- and hurrah-words – particularly by powerful people – is often strategic and selective. The use of these kinds of rhetorical techniques is particularly common in authoritarian politics, although they are also used in most kinds of political rhetoric, and in everyday life. The question of which terms are boo- or hurrah-words, and which words are positively or negatively loaded, varies between different discourses, their speakers and intended audiences. For example, "socialist" is a boo-word for conservative Americans, but was a hurrah-word for conformist Soviet citizens (prior to 1991), and it is a referential concept in theories of ideology. "Liberal" can also be a compliment, an insult, or a neutral descriptor. The word "bad" is usually negatively-loaded, but can also signify a status of being transgressive and tough, and therefore convey positive values (see Matza, 1967). When the term appears in pop music, like Michael Jackson's song "Bad" or the band Color Me Badd, it often has a positive loading.

Pateman (1975) suggests that the theory of boo- and hurrah-words was developed by American propaganda researchers to understand the functioning of the "totalitarian" ideologies of Stalinism and Nazism. However, the exact terms appear to have been invented by the English pacifist Maurice Cranston (1954). Similar concepts appeared earlier in the work of the American-based Institute for Propaganda Analysis, who use the term 'glittering generality' for hurrah-words (vague terms with positive connotations). In Stalinist ideology, some words, like "proletarian", always had a positive value, and enemies would be referred to by standardised insult-phrases such as "sharks of imperialism". However, the theory also applies to McCarthyite American politics at the time – where being called a "communist", "red", or "pinko liberal" was often enough to discredit a person and their claims.

There are other examples from today's political climate. For example, members of the alt-right commonly use the insult "cuck" (short for "cuckold") in place of responding to opponents' arguments. Calling someone a "cuck" suggests that they are unmasculine and weak, and they are being used or tricked by third parties. Certain kinds of hate speech, such as racial slurs, might also be extended forms of boo-words. In the neoconservative and neoliberal mainstream, words like "extremist", "terrorist" and "anti-social" function largely as boo-words. The concept of "anti-social behaviour" has no definable content. Anything which annoys someone for any reason might be "anti-social". On the left, words like "fascism", "racism" or "abuse", which also have definable meanings, can be deployed in a way which makes them boo-words, referring to whatever the speaker disapproves of. In extreme cases, a member of a marginalised group deploying the correct signifier is enough to end debate: if a black person says something is racist, therefore it's racist, and therefore wrong, and the conversation is over.

Bhabha has a particular set of boo- and hurrah-words derived from psychoanalysis and critical theory. Words like "denial", "disavowal", "foreclosure", "essentialism", "liberal", "humanist", "pure", "simple", and "truth" have strong negative connotations. On the other hand, words like "subversion", "messy", "difference", "radical", and "disjuncture" have positive connotations. It is a matter of debate whether these words are true boo- and hurrah-words, because some of them have a degree of denotative content. In common with many critical theorists, Bhabha gives a personal emotional connotation to the words he uses. Some of his boo-words are hurrah-words in a wider social context, and vice-versa. For example, "subversive" and "messy" are usually negatively loaded, but in Bhabha's work, they are positively loaded. Some of his loaded words are also referential terms in other language-games (e.g. "essentialism" might describe a particular philosophical position).

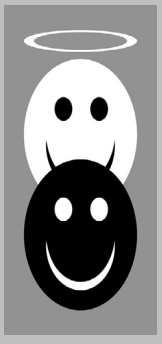
In boo/hurrah-word rhetoric, the almost magical power of the emotive signifier substitutes for rational argument and all other kinds of persuasion, often with polarising and discourse-closing effects. This leads to absolute judgements, in which avoiding the negative category and remaining in the positive one is more important than the reasons or affects of a particular situation. Hayakawa (1941) believes that such words 'reduce communication to a level of stubborn imbecility', preventing dialogue and considered judgement. This is the opposite of the translational effect Bhabha claims to be aiming for!

The functioning of boo-words is mainly that of a ***denkverbot***, or "order not to think". This term is used by Žižek (2001) to refer to the particular label "totalitarian", when used to describe radical theory (although Žižek sometimes uses similar rhetorical techniques himself). Because the emotive

effect of the boo-word short-circuits past any need to persuade by other means (including reasoning), it cuts off discussion at the earliest stage. It provides a good excuse for intolerance and for restrictions on free speech and intellectual inquiry, since listening to actual claims becomes surplus to requirements. The onerous requirement to respond to specific truth-claims is replaced by the much simpler practice of assigning statements to particular categories. Being a "pinko" or a "cuck" or a "bourgeois counter-revolutionary" is, by definition, never a good thing. The successful application of such a label serves to head off further discussion. There is no need to consider whether the "cuck" is right, because "cucks" are always wrong, or worse, always undermine the power (ethos) which makes it matter whether one's views are right or wrong. The pressure to avoid appearing to be a "cuck" has a chilling effect on thought and speech, which forecloses some options and imposes others. This has particular political effects. In her study of American military planners, Carol Cohn (1993) found that the desire not to be seen as a "pussy" or "wimp" had big effects which made planners more aggressive. These particular boo-words are connected to images of masculinity and strength. People act in certain ways to convey that they possess these virtues. But the resultant actions are often out-of-sorts with the actual political context. They lead to harmful, ineffective and counterproductive actions which are valued, not because of their political usefulness, but because they make someone seem strong. The pursuit of ethos and pathos undermines logos.

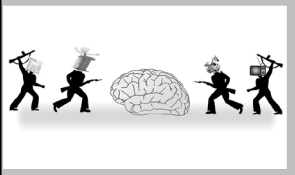
George Orwell parodies the use of boo- and hurrah-words in his critical dystopian novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (Orwell, 1949; c.f. above, 198-202). This novel depicts a fictional totalitarian society with hybrid features of Stalinism, fascism and English conservatism. The ruling regime has redefined and standardised language, in line with operationalist models. Useless and subversive words have been eliminated, and other words standardised, so that positive and negative forms of words always coincide. This leads to a new language, called Newspeak. One of the characteristics of Newspeak is that words can have

value-judgements directly attached by adding the words "plus"or "minus", and particularly strong value-judgements by double-plus or double-minus. This is strangely similar to a method used in rhetorical analysis to annotate loaded language! In his non-fiction writings, Orwell was highly critical of the use of loaded language and other manipulative techniques by politicians. He accused political rhetoric of a mixture of cliched imagery and lack of precision. 'As I have tried to show, modern writing at its worst does not consist in picking out words for the sake of their meaning and inventing images in order to make the meaning clearer. It consists in gumming together long strips of words which have already been set in order by someone else, and making the results presentable by sheer humbug' (Orwell, 1946). Orwell does not share Bhabha's enthusiasm for the mask of camouflage.



It is instructive to read Bhabha and imagine single/double plus and minus signs after some of his words, to show how heavily he loads particular passages. "The progressive(+) reading is crucially determined by the adversarial or agonistic situation itself (+); it is effective(+) because it uses the subversive(+), messy(+) mask of camouflage(+) and does not come like a pure(-) avenging angel(-) speaking the truth(-) of a radical historicity(-) and pure(-) oppositionality(-)". Of course, the fact that Bhabha openly admits using the mask of camouflage means that he is almost admitting such discursive manoeuvres! I have elsewhere argued (Robinson, 2005) that Lacanian theory (at least in the version commonly articulated by academics) is a variety of Barthesian myth. It treats its core beliefs (such as constitutive lack and co-constitutivity) as simply statements of fact, purified of any need for supporting argument or demonstration. This is also true of Bhabha's work. For example, the language of 'denial' used by theorists such as Bhabha involves an order not to think. By claiming that a critic 'denies' or 'forecloses' the fact which Bhabha recognises, he is able to embed the truth of

the fact into the statement without ever articulating a truth-claim – indeed, while keeping open the option of claiming that he said no such thing, and even that his theory does not make truth-claims!



Other critical theorists make similar claims. Discussing American warmongering, Herbert Marcuse notes that '[t]he "bad" words are *a priori* reserved for the Enemy, and their meaning is defined and validated by the actions of the Enemy regardless of their motivation or goal' (1969:75). 'Organised in this discriminatory fashion, language designates a priori the enemy as evil in his entirety and in all his actions and intentions' (1988:261). Marcuse does not share Orwell's preference for denotative language. But he reaches similar conclusions based on his desire to keep meaning open to a progressive future. Roland Barthes, an early poststructuralist, similarly criticises the use of hidden connotations which attach rigid indirect meanings to particular signs, rendering the signs ahistorical. In the case of certain kinds of loaded language, 'moral inflation bears on neither objects nor actions, but always on ideas, "notions", whose assemblage obeys less a communicative purpose than the necessity of a petrified code' (1997:108). Second-order signifiers deployed in this way are known in Barthesian vocabulary as 'myths' (see Robinson, 2011b). Edward Herman, who works on radical critiques of media, also uses Hayakawa's idea of snarl-words and purr-words in his theory of propaganda (1992:1). Together with Noam Chomsky, Herman has pioneered the analysis of western media as propaganda. Radicals such as Chomsky and Herman (1988) analyse systematic filters which ensure bias in a particular direction in the mass media. In contrast, poststructuralists tend to stress the role of audiences in interpreting media, and the flow of media texts in multiple directions.

Propaganda is a special type of rhetoric, which often makes use of loaded language. In propaganda, there is usually a split between the manipulator, who is using instrumental rationality and rhetorical proficiency, and a manipulated audience who are in a subordinate role in a (usually covert) hierarchy. (Poststructuralists sometimes use claims of audience agency to question the extent to which such manipulation is possible). Sherry Tuttle Ross (2002) analyses propaganda as a type of argument which seeks to establish epistemic merit (or believability) by epistemically defective means (which does not necessarily mean lying, as most propaganda does not involve truth-claims). In other words, propagandists try to get readers to believe their claims are true, without providing good reasons to believe they are true. In Bhabha's case, the reader's mind is likely fully engaged in trying to make sense of his difficult prose, so such devices can slip under the radar pretty easily.

It is questionable whether Bhabha is trying to manipulate readers. He usually seems to believe in the cause for which he propagandises. But he uses rhetorical techniques to produce epistemic (knowledge) effects, attempting to generate particular affects (emotions), partly by prohibiting and anathematising other affects, partly by means of his style. These strategies are means to the end of producing a particular experience of sublime or ecstatic acceptance of lack and contingency. On a generous reading, Bhabha's approach might be likened to Zen koans, which point towards non-dualism by creating a "click" or breakthrough. Like Bhabha, Zen Buddhists believe that the real nature of existence is non-dualistic (see above, 179-81 and below, 1001-2). Koans are often paradoxical or nonsensical in literal, denotative terms, but point to an awareness of non-dualism which cannot be expressed in language. An example is, "What is the sound of one hand clapping?" (or in its original form, "two hands make

a noise, what is the sound of one hand?") This is variously interpreted as a call to stillness, to a paradigm shift, to simplicity (the answer is silence, waving a hand in the air, or extending a hand to the Zen master), or as a deliberately unanswerable question. On a generous reading, Bhabha might be taken to use rhetoric to point towards non-duality in a similar way. On a less generous reading, it creates a stultifying closure of discourse which imposes an experience of lack through a *denkverbot* (order not to think) prohibiting anything else. It thus operates somewhere between the logic of a koan and the logic of propaganda.

In *Language, Truth and Politics*, Pateman (1975) discusses a discursive structure he terms "***invalidation***" (not to be confused with the wider sense of "invalidation" used to mean proving an argument wrong). In common with many Anglo-American writers, Pateman believes that many statements are truth-claims. They posit that something is true and should be accepted (or else rebutted) by the listener. Invalidation functions to deny the status of a truth-claim as a truth-claim. When a person's claim is invalidated, the content of the claim is automatically rendered invalid or irrelevant. It loses its status as a truth-claim. Pateman's example is the use of diagnostic labels in psychiatry. If a patient expresses certain views, these views are taken as evidence of a mental condition, such as paranoia. Such a label does not itself prove the belief to be false. It classifies it as a type of claim the truth or falsity of which is not relevant, or can be presupposed. It is "paranoid" and therefore it is automatically untrue, or it doesn't matter whether it's true or not.

This leads to situations where true claims are foreclosed in advance. In one case reported by R.D. Laing, a patient believed that his parents were trying to control him using telepathy. Psychiatrists assumed that this was a delusion, but it was actually true. In a similar recent case, an African-American woman was held against her will until she "admitted" that her claim that then-President Barack Obama followed her Twitter account was a delusion.

Obama does, in fact, follow the Twitter accounts of large numbers of his supporters, including this particular woman (Bump, 2015). On a wider scale, when abuse survivors are viewed as "hysterical women", this can lead to the automatic disbelief of their claims. In some contexts, entire cultures can be invalidated by being treated as objects of scientific discourse. For instance, Edward Saïd (1978) claims that Arab and Muslim cultures are invalidated by western Orientalist or area-studies scholars. Because of a set of non-falsifiable beliefs about the "timeless" Orient through which specific claims are filtered, any claim made by Arab or Muslim actors is automatically invalidated in terms of its truth-content. Other examples might include the idea of cognitive distortions in cognitive behavioural psychology, and the idea of rationalisation or neutralisation in criminal psychology. There are even articles dealing with "criminal thinking" (Walters, 1995), echoing Orwell's concept of thought-crime. Views are assessed, not as true or false, but as indicating a person's risk-profile. An example with coercive significance is the prohibition of particular claims, such as denying the existence of God or "glorifying terrorism". The truth or falsity of a claim is rarely relevant to its illegality in such cases of thought-crimes.

Analytical philosophers supposedly avoid rhetoric and focus on logical meaning, although analytical moral and political theory is actually awash with loaded language. In contrast, the tradition following from Hegel treats rhetoric as a necessary part of language. All language uses persuasion and metaphors, and there is no directly literal, logical language. There is thus more tolerance for rhetorical flourish in Continental philosophy, which Bhabha draws on, than in Anglo-American philosophy. In Laclau and Mouffe's theory, empty signifiers, which are similar to boo- and hurrah-words, are taken to be a necessary aspect of political discourse. They are the means by which constitutive lack in the social world is overcome to a sufficient degree to produce a kind of social order. Another discourse theorist, Michael Freeden (1998), argues that most central political concepts are "essentially contestable".

Ideas like "freedom", "justice" and "democracy" are constructed in such a way that they have no direct meaning. One of the central functions of political discourse is therefore to "decontest" concepts and give them particular, contextually resonant references. In some ways, this is a localised adaptation to political life of Wittgenstein's theory of rule-following. On a common reading of the later Wittgenstein, because every situation is different, every act of applying a rule is novel. One cannot literally apply a rule, but only reinterpret it over and over for each new situation.

In framing theory (used in media studies and social movement studies), perceptions and narrations of events are believed to be always underdetermined. They have no meaning in themselves. Instead, those who report and respond to events create meanings by putting events in particular frames (Entman, 1993; Gamson, 1989, 1992). Political conflicts often take the form of framing conflicts, or conflicts over different ways of making sense of an event. For example, there are at least five major media framings of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, including a pro-Israeli "law-and-order" frame, a pro-Palestinian "injustice and resistance" frame, and a hands-off "insoluble faraway conflict" frame (Gamson, 1992). The choice of particular words, including loaded language, is part of the process of framing. Indeed, loaded language may seem quite neutral if a particular frame is taken for granted. From a framing perspective, every point of view, even scientific or logical language, reflects a particular frame and is "loaded" a particular way. The appearance of truth or impartiality is itself a value-loading. There are no "unloaded" words, but only values which are so deeply buried that they are invisible.

The openness of Continental philosophy to rhetoric can be productive, as theorists use suggestive turns of phrase to create new ways of seeing or draw attention to aspects of the world, or simply to make their theories more accessible and appealing. Continental philosophy is certainly more exciting than Anglo-American analytical philosophy, and more open to radical thought. However, rhetorical flourish can also be used as a means for authors to communicate an "order not to think" to their readers. Certain topics or truth-claims are not to be raised as they are associated with a particular, negative label, the deployment of which is enough to rebut the claim and discredit the claimant. Acceptance of rhetorical flourish can also reinforce the negative tendencies denounced by Orwell: the combination of clichés with vagueness so that one's language loses any distinct analytical purchase. This seems to characterise Bhabha's work, especially when dealing with radical opponents. Bhabha is snarling or booing at these theories, at least as much as he is critiquing or deconstructing. This basically negative alternative to logos, and its complicity with dominant western political and media soundbyte techniques, puts Bhabha's critique of modern reason in a different light.

Marxist Theory

As we have seen (above, 134, 150), Bhabha particularly dislikes 'grand' critical theories such as Marxism. He believes that they express a western point of view, and silence other cultures. At the heart of Bhabha's objection is the ontological primacy of ambiguity, and the fact that this primacy is denied in the knowledge-claims made by radical theorists. Radicals are too certain for Bhabha's tastes, too definite in their use of categories. Hence,

Bhabha portrays analysis using critical categories – for example, David Harvey's idea of spaces of capital – as somehow losing the incomprehensible inbetween space in which identities emerge (LC, 220). Dependency theory is denounced as 'nationalist', 'nativist', and overly binarising (LC, 173). Marxist critics such as Fredric Jameson are denounced as unable to move beyond binary oppositions and reach the inbetween space (LC, 222). Bhabha also calls them narcissistic because they believe they can see truth beneath falsity (LC, 222). Narcissism usually refers to an exaggerated sense of self-importance, usually backed by confabulation (deliberate or unconscious falsehoods). But in Lacanian theory, it's associated with the identification of the real self with the ego-ideal – what the self wants to be. So, seeing "real" meanings behind "false" appearances indicates narcissism according to Bhabha. It's not clear why Bhabha thinks his own work is immune from the same criticism (he also claims to see "real" meanings which are not apparent on the surface of a text). In any case, the criticism is very basic. Bhabha believes there is an ineliminable, constitutive in-between space which subverts language. Marxists do not believe this, and therefore, they're wrong. The clinical label is just a particular way of saying they're wrong. Nothing more needs to be said.

A more substantive objection emerges in relation to historical processes. Marx used a model of history in which societies are assumed to progress from basic levels, through increasingly "higher" stages, to a liberated future. Socialism or communism is "higher" than capitalism, and capitalism is "higher" than feudalism. Bhabha terms this the Marxist theory of temporality (i.e. its theory of time or history). He counterposes a different view of temporality based on the time-lag (see above, 374) and the constant repetition and deferral arising from his theory of language. Bhabha claims that Marxists use a simplistic past-present division. Particular "stages" are either present or past. In contrast, Bhabha sees two discontinuous moments coexisting within every articulation.

Hence, Bhabha's criticism of Jameson is partly about Jameson's supposed view of time as a linear sequence (LC, 207). Because Jameson calls himself a Marxist, Bhabha assumes

that Jameson uses a linear view of time similar to Marx's. Hence, Jameson does not have a concept similar to Bhabha's 'time-lag', in which the experience of time is always ambivalent. This is a particular reading of Jameson's work, based mainly on the fact that Jameson calls himself a Marxist. However, this reading has been questioned. Paresh Chandra (2012) argues that Jameson is talking about contingent experiences of time, within neoliberal capitalism. Jameson takes the experience of time to be an effect of historical conditions. He does not treat time as linear. Indeed, he has no particular ahistorical view of time. In contrast, Bhabha's response talks about time in an ontological way. Bhabha talks about time in general, outside particular historical experiences. This requires Bhabha to elide (or ignore) Jameson's contextual position on time (2012:207). In other words, Bhabha adopts an ahistorical, decontextualised view of time. He sees time as, in a sense, always the same. He imposes the same structural model of ambiguity and deferral on every context he writes about. On the other hand, Jameson writes about contingent situations in a less absolute way. His lack of a concept of constitutive lack or constitutive ambiguity (such as Bhabha's time-lag) is arguably an advantage in this sense. It renders his theory less reductive, and allows for the contexts he studies to influence his writing to a greater degree than Bhabha does.

Bhabha celebrates postmodernity (or neoliberalism?) for its subversion of Jameson's worldview. It introduces an uncertainty similar to Conrad's 'horror'. Like a western traveller who finds unnamable horror in the jungles of Congo, 'Jameson is... a kind of Marlow in search of the aura of [veteran Marxist] Ernest Mandel, stumbling upon... Lefebvre, Baudrillard and Kevin Lynch' (LC, 216). It thus wounds the narcissism of

Jameson's concept of class, the 'loss of its own ontological priority' (LC, 223). In other words, postmodernity is a disruptive force which wrecks Jameson's search for meaning. To retain his theoretical commitments, Jameson has to 'disavow' the disjunction and displacement which generate the textual effects he theorises (LC, 217). In other words, Bhabha labels Jameson as "disavowing" because he disagrees with Bhabha about the reasons for disjuncture. Jameson attributes disjuncture to discontinuous statements, Bhabha to co-constitution. Bhabha does not attempt to show that the latter view is better than the latter. Instead, he resorts to a diagnostic label.

According to Bhabha, fragmentary identities produce disruption of the dominant order at the point of inscription into it (see above, 212-19). Jameson instead talks about spatial and cultural distance. He argues that capital creates and integrates different kinds of spaces. Bhabha thinks that Jameson does this to preserve the 'class subject' from the fragmenting effects which destroy every fixed subjectivity, including class, race and gender (LC, 219). In the reduction of displacement to 'the "three phases" of capital, the innovative energy of the "third" space is somehow lost' (LC, 220). Bhabha's syntax here projects his truth-claim via the claim that Jameson's strategy "loses" something which may not even exist. Bhabha also attacks Jameson's supposed commitment to ideas such as the base/superstructure and inside/outside binaries. Such binaries are supposedly untenable in postmodernity (LC, 220), despite Bhabha's deployment of similar binaries elsewhere (see above, 251-8, 264-8). They are also said to silence marginalised groups who remain invisible (LC, 221) and to treat non-class identities as reactive or ideological effects of the capitalist Spectacle (LC, 222). In short, they prevent the type of politics Bhabha advocates.

This discussion has political significance. In his own words, Bhabha wants an 'open future' for minorities. He wants marginalised groups to determine their own destinies, rather than being dragged along in an inevitable historical process. This position is a reaction against attempts to force non-western societies to "modernise" in line with the west. Bhabha's view of subject-construction means that new identities can always be formed (although it

also means their basic structure is predetermined). He criticises Marxists such as Jameson for denying such an open future (LC, 219). Chandra replies that this argument contradicts Bhabha's ontology. There cannot be an open future in a world where ambivalence and time-lag are universal. If the present is always disjunctive, the future does not exist (2012:209). In other words, in Bhabha's ontology, there is no linear progression of time, and no open progression of time either, but only a process of repetition of deferral. Since this structure of repetition repeats itself, there cannot be an open future. Bhabha's response would probably be that openness is built into the structure, through ambiguity. Chandra also argues that Jameson does not himself foreclose such an open future. He simply observes that it does not really exist today (2012:210). In a way, Bhabha mistakes an empirical question for a political question. He wants something to be true, so he posits it as true – rather than examining how it can be realised. It is desirable (almost a hurrah-word!) for marginalised people to be free to create their destiny, but this does not mean they actually are.

If Bhabha is saying there's an open future because he wants one, when in fact there are structural blockages to an open future, his theory is politically destructive. Bhabha's wishful thinking means that he pretends that people are free in neoliberalism, when really they aren't (or aren't until they break free of neoliberalism). Bhabha sees present experience as an effect of a subjectively based process. People are free to create the future through their practices of deferral, hybridisation, textual subversion, and so on. But Jameson denies this. He doesn't issue a performative command that an open future cannot exist. He describes a reality in which an open future is blocked. It is therefore a fallacy to say that Jameson forecloses an open future, much as it is a fallacy to say that Newton stops us floating in the air. This fallacy stems from the same place as claims that Bhabha, or particular artists, break down dominant binaries. It arises because of the 'language model' (see above, 81-5). If one accepts that language is in some sense determinant, then ways of

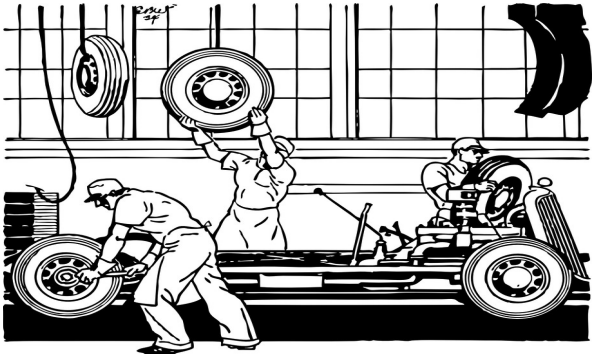
classifying reality bring about the realities they posit. If one does not, then claims relying on the assumption that they do so are begging the question.

On the other hand, beliefs in inevitable progress can provide convenient excuses for forcibly imposing the outcomes one takes to be inevitable. This is common in orthodox Marxist attitudes to colonialism and development, such as Stalinist forced industrialisation. The idea of a necessary course of history is not necessarily true, or politically progressive in the last instance. But the criticism that it is an unethical view because it takes away marginalised people's agency is fallacious. One could also add that many Marxists (autonomists, Maoists, Open Marxists, the Midnight Notes Collective...) see the agency of the oppressed as the driving force in history. On some readings of Marx on alienation and fetishism, capital is nothing more than workers' agency turned against itself! Furthermore, Jameson is an Althusserian Marxist, which means that his approach is largely "synchronic". He looks at the structures of a present situation in isolation from their past and future development. It is unlikely that he believes in progress through historical stages. Althusser labels the kind of linear, progressive, teleological view of history criticised by Bhabha as "historicism", and rejects it out of hand. Jameson deviates from Althusser's approach in insisting that theorists should always historicise, but he means this in terms of contextual analysis rather than teleology. Bhabha is fighting a straw-man.

In another criticism, Bhabha accuses Jameson of imposing class identity as the primary identity. For Bhabha, this is a problematic, possibly totalitarian, move. However, Chandra replies that Jameson sees class as a process, not an identity. This is a matter of some importance today. Contemporary identity politics, and theorists such as Laclau and Mouffe, consider class to be a positionality or social identity or subject-position, similar to

race, gender, sexuality, and disability (which in turn are all similar to each other). "Essentialising" or "prioritising" class identity is oppressive towards the other identities.

But this is not what Marx or Marxists mean by "class". The Marxist view of class is a way of conceiving the structures and relationships which pertain across most of the waking hours of most of the population. It is related to the central ways in which society is organised. Capitalism is conceived as a general organising model, and classes exist at the level of its structural matrix (even if the formation of class identities is indeterminate). Its equivalent in poststructuralism or postcolonial theory is not race or gender, nor a series of identities, but culture or the language model. Marxists see capitalism and class as the generative structural level in the same way Bhabha sees language, culture and identity as the generative structural level. Capitalism is generative because it structures working life, consumption, reproduction, and social activity more broadly. For example, Marxists trace the various reified, separated categories of life back to the primary matrix of commodification (Lukács, 1971), whereas most poststructuralists attribute them to the basic structure of language. The dispute between these two ways of theorising social life is concealed beneath the accusation that Marxism elevates class over other identities. By turning class into an identity (within an implied generative cultural field), poststructuralists and identity theorists beg the question. They assume what needs to be proven: that the cultural field is ontologically primary over capitalism.



This disagreement comes out clearly in relation to Bhabha and Jameson. As Chandra argues, Jameson recognises multiple identities. However, he also believes there is an underlying terrain on which identities form (2012:211). This is the terrain of capitalism and its mutations. In other words, Bhabha mistakenly accuses Jameson of making certain identities primary. Where they really disagree is not on the formation of identities or their relative importance. Where they really disagree is in their social ontology. For Jameson, the underlying structure is a social structure, whereas for Bhabha, the underlying structure is eternal repetition of deferral at the level of language or culture. For example, when discussing migration, Jameson talks about employment as the main reason people migrate. Bhabha does not. For Chandra, this suggests that Bhabha is unwillling to deal with the question of capitalism. Take away capitalism (including the necessity to work), and migration would look very different (Chandra, 2012:211-12).

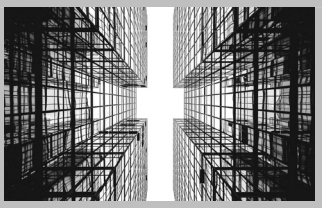
Chandra gives the example of violence against Biharis (i.e. people who come from a poorer Indian state) in the richer Indian state of Maharashtra. In this case, migrant and anti-migrant struggles are clearly not driven by white colonialism. Nor are they driven by cultural differences. The dispute is about availability of work, not 'culture' (2012:212). In ignoring such explanations, Chandra argues that Bhabha privileges the 'capital-community contradiction' over the 'capital-class contradiction' (2012:212). It has similarly been argued in Nigeria that ethnic conflict is really class conflict 'obscured by identity politics' (Zalik, 2004:403). The issues motivating conflict are about land rights, access to state revenues, the effects of oil extraction and so on, but they are displaced onto ethnicity because of the clientelist, rentier structure of the Nigerian state. Ethnic identities are easily available ways for states to divide-and-rule populations (c.f. Mamdani, 1996; Daher, 2016a, 2016b) and for people to mobilise against injustice. One could also discuss here Marxist theories of imperialism and colonialism, which focus on economic motives such as capture of primary resources and markets, and theories of gender, sexuality and disability, such as the autonomous feminist theory of reproductive labour (Mies and Bennholdt-Thomsen, 2000; Federici, 2009; James and Dalla Costa, 1972). If one uses Marxism instead of

poststructuralism, one does not simply suppress other identities and reduce everything to class. One ends up with a different – in some ways richer – interpretive field rooted in theories of commodification and resistance to it.

In the Margins: Fredric Jameson and Postmodernity

Fredric Jameson is a prolific Marxist literary and cultural critic who has written a number of wide-ranging articles focused on cultural shifts within his lifetime. Although he identifies as Marxist and not poststructuralist, he is by no means an orthodox Marxist and he clearly makes use of poststructuralist theory. He is also heavily influenced by Althusser, whose Marxist scholarship is similar to early French poststructuralists and who also influenced authors such as Bhabha and Spivak (see above, 93-5). Jameson is controversial amongst poststructuralists due to his essay "Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism". In this essay, he seeks to portray postmodernism as an effect of neoliberal capitalism and as well-attuned to current economic conditions. As we shall see (below, 890-907), this is also a common line of argument in Marxist critiques of Bhabha.

In the 1980s, Jameson developed a Marxist approach to cultural interpretation. The central axiom of this approach was an imperative to understand works of art primarily as effects of their historical context.



Culture is ideological in the Althusserian sense. It ties up particular meanings with identities which arise from the social structure. The production of culture is also the production of everyday life as it is lived, practiced and experienced. Shifts in culture, such as the rise of artistic styles should therefore be explained in historical terms, as effects of social shifts. They should not be explained as purely aesthetic shifts or as instances of individual genius. For example, postmodern architecture emerged in the 1980s because it ideologically expresses the conditions of neoliberal capitalism.

However, according to Jameson, culture does not directly follow from economic structures. The two are dialectically related and react back on one another. In his insistence on positionality as the key to understanding colonial texts, Bhabha is closer to Jameson than he would like to admit. Against Bhabha's claim that Jameson does not recognise any ambiguity, it is important to note that Jameson's theory also involves frequent references to contradictions and antagonisms. Jameson's approach to social change involves sharpening the existing antagonisms between different aspects of the neoliberal social structure - for instance, those between consumerism and democracy, or American global power and global cosmopolitanism.

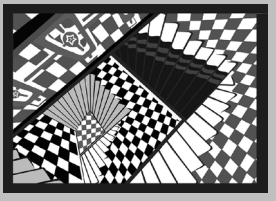
Jameson's article on postmodernism appeared in 1984, and he expanded it into a book published in 1991. In these works, he seeks to interpret the same "new times" which concerned Bhabha and the *Marxism Today* group. Neoliberalism, which Jameson rather optimistically names "late

capitalism", generates conditions of insecure identity. Production of art, literature, theory and culture, like other forms of production, occurs in such a field of insecurity. Capitalist logics have expanded to more and more of social life. Production is now high-speed, globalised, and "just-in-time". Products are produced to exploit their cultural value, rather than for use. Finance has become increasingly important and uncontrolled. Consumer goods are meant to be replaced regularly as fashions change. These conditions cause the "incredulity towards metanarratives" which characterises postmodern/poststructuralist theory. They also cause a move towards pastiche, collage and juxtaposition of different images and cultural sources. Older forms of integrated meaning break down. Whereas earlier approaches implied a critique of or support for the dominant order, pastiche usually has no normative grounds whatsoever.

Another effect is that people's lives no longer feel connected to past or future history. Capitalism has colonised the cultural sphere. This has led to the blurring of distinct identities, which still exist, but are no longer immediately visible. The past is reduced to a series of styles and images which can be commodified and consumed. Jameson famously discusses the postmodern architecture of the Bonaventure Hotel in this context. This massive, glass-covered, three-building Los Angeles skyscraper looms over the surrounding terrain. According to Jameson, it seems self-enclosed, totalising, and cut off from the rest of the world. It is also confusing and disconcerting. For Jameson, late capitalism has alienated space from its historical context. It has also confused people. People don't yet have the ability to make sense of the spaces arising from postmodern capitalism. The system also has a focus on communication which might explain the importance of language in poststructuralist theory. Global communication technologies and cybernetic models of organisation are enmeshed with postmodern capitalism.

Jameson also accounts for present structures of affect in a different way from Bhabha. Without a relationship to the past or future, Jameson claims, people are left with a fascination with the present. People start to experience themselves as just a set of signifiers, thrown around between different disjunctive present moments. In general, people are unable to feel anything because of this change. However, people also counter this through temporary intense experiences of terror or euphoria. In particular, there is a new kind of "hysterical sublime" or "technological sublime" which finds enjoyment in the self-enclosure and repetition of cybernetic systems. Marxism can understand such shifts, whereas postmodernism cannot. Late capitalism causes a collapse of the sense that we can see beyond the surface appearance of capitalism, or indeed, that anything exists below the surface. "Postmodernists" like Bhabha are successfully subjectified into this experience of a flat, totalising reality. They are produced as good, conformist subjects of late capitalism. In contrast, Marxism retains a notion of depth and a horizon beyond capitalism.

Jameson has also written widely on theories of ideology, dialectical theory, the history of aesthetics, utopias, and modernism. His works on modernist and utopian art are more sympathetic than his works on postmodernism. Jameson believes that modernity still had a residual sense that there was something outside or beyond capitalism. Not everything was commodified. In contrast, postmodernity denies that there is anything outside the commodity system. It can't tell the real world from the world of capitalist culture. According to Jameson, identity politics is also an aspect of postmodernity. It arises because of pastiche or hybridisation in the global mediascape, and because of tendencies to both multiply and homogenise identities. The global media makes the world into a single space. It offers a range of subjectivities. This range is often wider than the range offered by local or national identities.



However, capitalism also standardises the world into a single space. It is destructive of local cultural differences. This has led to the rise of neo-traditionalist movements which seek to protect local cultures from capitalism. They blame the effects of capitalist globalisation on cultural 'others'. Jameson doubts that such movements can offer any progressive alternative to capitalism. He instead seeks global social movements which use the contradictions in neoliberalism to affirm difference and create freer social spaces. Despite Bhabha's criticisms of Jameson's supposed Eurocentrism, Jameson's work is immensely popular in universities in China. It has been used there, both to celebrate the liberating potential of postmodern changes, and to criticise their disempowering effects.

Jameson's body of work has little in common with Bhabha's straw-man presentation of it. In my view, Jameson's analyses are sometimes reductive. He assumes that cultural phenomena are effects of (or at least strongly co-constituted with) capitalism, and reads the available evidence to support this conclusion. He thus gives too much weight to structure, and not enough to agency. In particular, he ignores the agency of social movements in the 1960s-70s and since. History is not just the history of capitalist forms, but also the history of class (and wider social) struggle. Active forces of joy, life and becoming (or in Marxist jargon, "labour") are always reappearing in resistance to dominant capitalist forms, leading to conflicts and social changes. People are not always-already successfully interpellated in a dominant ideology. Instead, the successful imposition of capitalism has to be accomplished anew each day. Hence, I don't agree that "postmodernism" is mainly an effect of shifts in capitalism. Rather, its origins are tied-up with the anti-capitalist movements of the 1960s-70s. There is also a certain contradiction revealed by Jameson's own ability to see and articulate theory which is out of sorts with the structural determinants which otherwise limit what theorists can produce. This problem is solved by situating Jameson, along with Bhabha, Foucault, Baudrillard and Deleuze, as a "product" of the 1960s-70s wave.

In contrast with Bhabha's portrayal, however, Jameson does not "swoop down" on historical situations with a pre-formed analysis. Not only is his analysis often novel and responsive to context. He also believes in immanent critique – the analysis of texts in their own terms so as to show and transcend their internal contradictions. For example, he makes heavy use of Baudrillard's concept of the simulacrum, which he sees as central to late capitalist culture. Because Jameson engages in immanent critique of "postmodernism", he often ends up using and developing poststructuralist concepts. This immanent critique has also led to his being perceived as a postmodernist or a postmodern Marxist by some critics. In my view, the general tone of his work is hostile to postmodernism and late capitalism. His account is mostly pessimistic. However, he seeks to use contradictions within neoliberal capitalism as levers for social change. Like Bhabha, he believes that people create and reshape cultures, either to protect local sites from capitalist intrusion, or to weave new cultural fabrics out of a disrupted global reality.

Chandra's defence of Jameson against Bhabha demonstrates the key stakes in Bhabha's polemics against his radical opponents. The issue is not really about historical teleology, the primacy of class, Eurocentrism, or even the primacy of ambiguity. Rather, the root disagreement between Bhabha and radical theorists is about social ontology, or the structure of social life. Bhabha objects to (and uses derogatory clinical and political labels against) approaches which reject his core Derridean or Lacanian ontology. This rhetoric both conceals the core ontology by assuming its truth, and inaccurately projects its key assumptions onto opponents. Jameson, for example, does not believe that everything is produced through the inbetween zone and the co-constitution of self-other relations. Like Bhabha, Jameson is interested in Althusser, and sees ideology operating in invisible ways in

culture. People are 'interpellated' and 'constructed' as 'subjects', with definite identities, by social processes. Unlike Bhabha, Jameson sees this process mainly in extra-linguistic, structural terms. 'Postmodernity' – including the types of disjuncture, precarity, textual closure and impermanence celebrated by Bhabha – is for Jameson the cultural logic of the current stage of capitalism. For Bhabha, power creates an illusion of fixed egos, and disjuncture disrupts this illusion. For Jameson, capitalist power in fact creates people *as* disjointed, precarious 'subjects'.

Also, Marxists do not believe in co-constitutivity in the same way Bhabha does. Marxists believe that capital and labour are in an antagonistic self-other relationship. But this relationship is historically contingent. Although Althusserians such as Jameson might not believe this, Marxists generally maintain that labour is a positive force which is creative and productive of its own accord. This is why labour can destroy capital without destroying itself. It can free itself from alienation because alienation is a secondary effect, not constitutive of identity. For Bhabha, such a position entails self-identity, and therefore narcissism and naivety. However, these snarl-words are covers for a philosophical disagreement. Jameson does not agree with Bhabha's underlying ontology. Instead of trying to demonstrate that his own conclusions are more accurate, more effective, or more theoretically sound than Jameson's, Bhabha slaps labels on Jameson based on the assumption that his own theory is right. This is known in philosophy as 'begging the question' – the question is posed in such a way as to assume its answer.

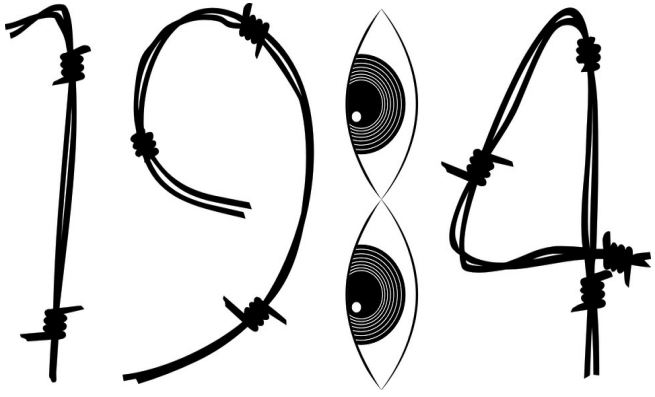
When Bhabha criticises Marxists, he generally accuses them of lacking, forgetting, or denying the fundamental nature of ambiguity. Marxists' comparatively direct, un-poetic speech is taken as an effect of this deficit. While Bhabha depicts this difference as a case of loss or denial by Marxists, it also expresses a view that something fundamentally unnamable is lost in any clear, direct analysis. The stake of the disagreement is whether this unnamable thing, if it exists at all, has the significance (and aesthetic effects) Bhabha posits. In my view, the idea that pursuing a neo-Marxist interpretation is objectionably narcissistic because it posits a position of truth, and is objectionable on this ground to a greater extent than is Bhabha's indirect positing of the truth of his own underlying beliefs, is untenable. Bhabha is simply accusing others of theoretical sins because their style or ontology differs from his own. Such accusations are used as prohibitions on discourse which differs from Bhabha's own. Crucially, Bhabha makes little or no attempt to show that his own analysis of culture is more accurate or consistent or otherwise better than that of Jameson, or any other opponent. His critique is largely circular: the opponent is wrong because, according to the categories of Bhabha's theory, the opponent is committing an identifiable error. That the error is in fact an error requires that Bhabha's theory is true, meaning the entire argument derives its truth from its truth – it is circular and unproven.

In a roundtable, Bhabha is drawn by other participants to talk about the commons. The commons is a powerful concept in the Midnight Notes school of Open Marxism. It refers to goods and services which are available freely to everyone, or more generally, which operate as sites of collective living, production or reproduction. The historic 'commons' were common land, owned by nobody, where anyone could herd their flocks and gather medicinal herbs and firewood. Open Marxists expand this concept to ideas such as the 'digital common' – peer-to-peer filesharing, free-access websites, open source software. The commons is always pitted against 'enclosure', which turns the commons into private, commodified areas. Bhabha speaks sideways to this discussion. Firstly, he insists that the commons cannot be something one simply consumes. 'It has to be a productive,

interlocutory relationship' (RCA, 10). This brings the issue back to the language model, but is discontinuous with how material commons actually work. He then argues that inequality cannot be eliminated even within a commons. Finally, he attacks the idea of equality as risking 'universalization'. This is dangerous because 'universalization is the enemy of historical specificity. It is the enemy of difference'. Instead of equality, we should only aim 'to create conditions where people can realize their agency', i.e. equality of opportunity as defined by liberals such as Dworkin and Sen (RCA, 10). Bhabha's hostility to equality is here manifest. He does not want to rupture the competitive aspects of neoliberal economies. He worries that equality can become a master-signifier (a 'universal'), yet as we have seen (above, 251-8, 264-8), he uses various concealed universals in his own work. Finally, one almost gets the impression that Bhabha does not *want* difference to be harmoniously reconciled within one or another 'multicultural' form of diversity. Any success along these lines would compromise the entire Levinasian project.

In 'Doublespeak and the Minority of One', Bhabha engages with the English socialist George Orwell's defence of clarity and literal language. Orwell argued in 'Politics of the English Language' (1946; see above, 827-8) that language should give precedence to

'concrete objects and mental images'. This keeps thought focused and renders it capable of conveying an individual's 'truth'. It inoculates against 'ready-made abstractions', cliches and euphemisms. Orwell is suspicious of euphemisms and rhetoric which allow people to name things without forming mental pictures. He believes this encourages conformity and unethical action in totalitarian systems (DM1, 180). Given his own verbosity, Bhabha must reject this view. Indeed, he goes as far as to describe Orwell's attempts to reform language as 'suffused with the imagination of totalitarian violence, even a kind of eugenicist enthusiasm' (DM1, 180). The objectionable "eugenicist" metaphors are common terms like 'scrapping' and 'driving out'. To Bhabha, this amounts to a fantasy of 'driving out the "other"' (DM1, 181), even if the "other" is only a word. Bhabha also attempts to psychoanalyse Orwell (or rather, his writing persona, which is supposedly distinct from his 'person'). He suggests that the project of exposing doublethink and Newspeak 'cannot help but induce a kind of paranoia in the *writer*' (DM1, 182). He also compares Orwell's valuation of clarity to the features of Newspeak which simplify and remove ambiguity. Finally, having suggested that *Nineteen Eighty-Four*'s Winston Smith uses "dialogical" language to resist his torturer, he suggests that ambiguous, poetic discourse is important for freedom (DM1, 186).



There are important stakes in this argument. Orwell holds a view of truth as individually cognisable rather than socially constructed. People should value true statements over social convention. Bhabha opposes this view. He believes that individual perceptions are affected by forces individuals are unaware of. The appearance of obvious truths is a

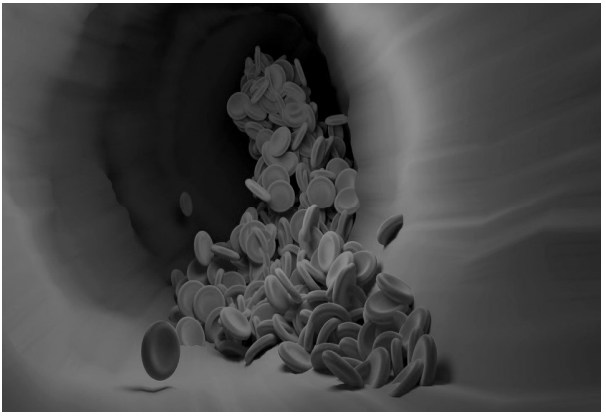
secondary, false effect of ego-formation. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Winston does not use ambivalence to subvert the regime. He clings to empirical truth as a standpoint outside the regime's discourse. In the novel, this ultimately fails. Bhabha uses this development as leverage to insert his own beliefs. For Bhabha, authoritarian regimes seek empirical clarity. Oppressed minorities use subversive "doublethink". Comparing Bhabha to Orwell may, indeed, expose difficulties in the articulation of operationalist Newspeak with irrationalist doublethink. The operationalism of Newspeak consists in the exclusion of poetic, aspirational and speculative language as much as in the functional reduction of individual experience (c.f. Marcuse, 1991/1964). Orwell counterposes concrete empiricism to operationalism. Bhabha may well have picked up on complicities between the two. In practice, some empiricists reduce the thinkable to the existent, much as Newspeak does. Yet many of Bhabha's criticisms are clearly spurious, if only because they also apply to him. If every attempt to change language is eugenicist and totalitarian, then where do Bhabha's interventions stand? Bhabha's work is also suffused both with violent metaphors (see above, 274-6) and imagination of colonial violence. He also argues in ways which seem designed to "scrap" and "drive out" opposing idea such as Marxism and liberalism. The type of politics with which he is associated involves extensive attempts to suppress language which is viewed as harmful. If Orwell's proposals for language reform are eugenicist and totalitarian, then so, necessarily, are Bhabha's.

There is a similar reductionism in Bhabha's treatment of the radical, anarchic poststructuralists Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. In this case, however, rather than simply heaping opprobrium on their work, Bhabha performs a kind of splitting. He divides their work into valuable and objectionable parts, absorbs the former, and rejects the latter. The split is largely defined by his own prior categories and involves little engagement with the authors' theory and its internal structure. Instead, they are taken to be right when they agree with Bhabha, and wrong when they disagree with him.

On the one hand, Bhabha's reading of Deleuze and Guattari reduces them to Lacan or Derrida. Their work is valued to the extent that it can be (mis-)read to mimic Bhabha's views. For example, Bhabha praises the idea of "minor literature". This is a concept developed in Deleuze and Guattari's book on Kafka (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986). In this book, they contrast Kafka's marginal, nomadic way of using German with the 'major' literatures of more conventional writers. A "minor" (or "minoritarian") process in Deleuze and Guattari's work is a process which escapes or rejects, or tries to escape or reject, the hegemonic power of a majority identity, such as nationality. Minorities form at the margins, based on connections of desires and flows. They form "war-machines" which destroy dominant structures, and "lines of flight" which lead away from regimes of fixity and control. Minorities are thus closely associated with rhizomes, becoming, deterritorialisation, and the other affirmative concepts of Deleuzian thought (see above, 611-13).

This type of "minority" is not the same as a minority group as usually defined, which is a specific group with a definite identity. For Deleuze and Guattari, such groups belong to the "majoritarian" regime of state power. Minor literatures are literatures which operate as minoritarian processes of becoming (see above, 611-13 on minoritarianism). At one point, Deleuze ascribes three defining characteristics to minor literatures, in contrast with major

literatures. Minor literatures involve deterritorialisation (i.e. destruction of fixed coordinates of meaning) of the language in which they are written, the connection of the individual and the political (rather than, say, novels about family life), and a collective type of utterance which gives statements a political or social, rather than solely personal, significance. Minor literatures thus create new forms of subjectivity, rather than reaffirming existing identities. According to Deleuze and Guattari, Kafka does not have a definite identification with a particular "people" or identity. In his work, the people is "missing", and so he tries to summon it into being, creatively. They link this style to Kafka's marginal position as a Czech Jew on the margins of the former Austro-Hungarian empire. They also emphasise how Kafka subverts the authority and integrity of the language he uses. Minor literatures emerge from revolutionary social conditions. It is easy to see how this analysis foreshadows Bhabha's view of minority culture.



Not surprisingly, this idea that marginalised peoples produce subversive, meaning-disrupting texts endears Bhabha to the concept of minor literature. However, this concept is also a threat to Bhabha, because it provides an alternative to the Lacanian/Derridean way of understanding marginality and creativity. Hence, he subtly reinflects Deleuze and Guattari's ideas to render them compatible with his own. He suggests that minor literatures arise within majority literatures, at their in-between points (MM, 440). This is a misreading. Deleuze and Guattari emphasise connections and lines over points, but they

have no concept of in-betweenness in Bhabha's sense. Rather, they see minor literatures as 'nomadic'. These literatures initiate lines of flight which lead out of the majority literature and away from the condition of being a majority. This process culminates in 'absolute deterritorialisation', a social logic in which the dominant 'trunk' disappears entirely (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987:510-11).

On the one hand, Bhabha reinterprets and appropriates Deleuze and Guattari's idea of minor literature. On the other hand, Bhabha rejects Deleuze and Guattari's affirmative politics, in which the experience of transformation is usually joyful or euphoric. For Bhabha, the affect corresponding to minor literature is anxiety (MM, 441). This is a strange claim, when Deleuze and Guattari spent so much energy trying to rebut the usual reading of Kafka as pessimistic (they see him as comedic and carnivalesque instead). It may rest on a confusion of the affect which deterritorialisation generates in conformists with the affect experienced by people who are themselves on a line of flight. However, Bhabha claims that Deleuze and Guattari leave the affect of anxiety 'unacknowledged', or even 'disavow' it (MM, 441). They do this because they avoid constitutive antagonism (MM, 441). They treat politics as 'immediate', as if it can do without 'phantasmatic identifications' and affect (MM, 442). In other words, the root objection here is once more that other authors do not accept Bhabha's ontology. Similarly, Bhabha adopts the Deleuzian concept of becoming-minority. But when he does so, he re-attaches the concept to positionality and lack (LC, 229-31).

Indeed, Bhabha claims that Deleuze and Guattari disavow affect as such – not only particular affects. This is a bizarre claim to make. There is extensive discussion in their work of affect, ranging from the altered consciousness of the 'body without organs' to the practices of schizoanalysis as a clinical approach, to the projectile affects of horse-riding nomads, to Guattari's theory of group phantasy. It is, however, true that Deleuze and Guattari deal with affect very differently from Bhabha, Derrida, or Lacan. Bhabha seems to be trying to disguise his disagreement with Deleuze and Guattari on the nature of affect as a lack of a theory of affect in their work. For Deleuze and Guattari, there are at least two series of affects, of which those mobilised by Bhabha (reactive affects) are simply one type. They believe that, in addition to the type of politics based on phantasmatic identification (i.e. on Lacanian types of subject-formation), there is a second type which is based on 'machinic' connections of desires at a molecular level. This 'schizophrenic' flux replaces the process of self-other co-constitution in the formation of social relations. Deleuze and Guattari *do* talk about affect and fantasy, but not in a Lacanian way. In Deleuze and Guattari's account, the affect corresponding to deterritorialisation, minoritarianism, and becoming is a kind of exhilarating joy, a 'little detail which swells [up] and carries you off' (1987:292).

And the theory is not simply speculative. This process of molecular flux is observable empirically in autonomous social movements (see Robinson, 2018a; Peterson, 2001;

Ravage, 1999). The flux which carries one away is similar to how processes of transformation and transgression are described by participants in social movements, whereas anxiety is associated with successful repression (Robinson, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c; Bey, 1985; Juris, 2008:66; Scott, 1990:208-9; Free Association, 2005:25; Mueller, 2006:53; Apoifis, 2016:142; Anon., 2005:181; Vosper, 2017a, 2017b; Papadimitropoulos, 2010:71). Such accounts look very little like Bhabha's preferred affects. Rather, they involve feelings of empowerment, intensity, joy, and euphoria. In a way, autonomous social movements do exactly what Jameson proposes, sharpening the contradictions among the affects of neoliberalism by radicalising the experience of intensity (c.f. van Veen, 2010). Minoritarian processes are anxiety-inducing for conservative people who observe them from outside, but not for those engaged in them.

The most fundamental difference between Bhabha and Deleuze/Guattari is in their theories of desire. For Bhabha, desire is an effect of existing identities (Deleuze and Guattari's 'molar selves'), these identities are co-constitutive, and the difference between coloniser and colonised is at most ambiguous. Identities are the same as selves. Bhabha does not distinguish hidden transcripts from subversive public performances, but assumes that the impact on the public social text *is* the subjectivity of the colonised. For Deleuze, in contrast, desire pre-exists subject-formation. Desire emerges at a sub-individual or trans-individual level, as a connection of parts of the self to different kinds of objects and flows. It constantly moves in a process of producing flows, connections and ruptures which give meaning to life. The fantasmatic type of politics channels but also captures and restricts this process of 'desiring-production'. Therefore, for Bhabha, the disruption of dominant categories also disrupts desire, and causes anxiety. For Deleuze and Guattari, it releases desire from entrapment. The accounts of social movement participants largely confirm Deleuze and Guattari's view and disconfirm Bhabha's.

The discursive trick Bhabha plays when he claims that Deleuze and Guattari disavow affect is to treat disagreement with his own analysis as psychological denial or avoidance. Rhetorically, this is another instance of loaded language. 'Disavowal' has a technical meaning in Lacanian theory. It refers specifically to the structure of desire in so-called "perverse" personalities, who according to Lacan, both accept and deny reality (particularly, constitutive lack). For example, someone might handle castration anxiety by imagining that their mother has a penis, and denying they ever saw anything else. However, Bhabha does not seem to be using it in a precise way. Deleuze and Guattari's texts do not simultaneously affirm and deny constitutive lack; they are closer to "foreclosure" in Lacanian terminology. (Indeed, Bhabha's splitting approach to Deleuze/Guattari and Fanon is more reminiscent of Lacanian disavowal). Rather, Bhabha uses "disavowal" as a boo-word. He uses it to attach a negative value to Deleuzian theory because of Deleuze and Guattari's disagreement with a postulate Bhabha assumes to be true. The truth of Bhabha's position is not directly posited, but concealed behind words like 'disavowal'. It is also interesting that Bhabha here reproduces Lacan's theory of psychosis as foreclosure, in his accusation that Deleuze and Guattari disavow subject-formation. In both cases, an attribution of reality-denial is a way of classifying the absence of the basic Lacanian structure of subjectivity.

In fact, Deleuze and Guattari are quite aware of the role of constitutive lack in Lacanian and Derridean philosophy. Guattari was a former patient and student of Lacan's! They are not 'in denial' about the implications of their theory. Rather, they simply disagree with the Lacanian analysis – and go to great lengths explaining why, and providing alternative theories. Indeed, *Anti-Oedipus* is in many respects an 'Anti-Lacan', critiquing the repressive implications of the lack-based theories on which Bhabha draws. Deleuze and Guattari claim, for instance, that desire is 'molecular', involving assemblages or 'machines' which are formed from non-linguistic objects and flows. It is therefore not subject to the binary structure of language. They claim that psychoanalysis leads to reductive readings of the particular desires and attachments of individual patients. Psychoanalysis reduces complex,

eccentric molecular combinations – such as a child playing with a toy train – to a limited structural model – the train must stand for a penis, or an archetype, or 'the Other'. Their own theory instead uses logics of combinations of energies, flows, and objects. They particularly dislike the idea that desire is based on lack, which they see as authoritarian, akin to saying "no factories without bosses" (Guattari, 1995:151-162).

In many regards, this issue of the structure of desire is a localised, desire-level variant of the issue between Bhabha and Scott (see above, 495-6, 517-19). In that case, also, Bhabha's assumption that people *are* the textual identities they perform in the dominant script prevents him from engaging with the empirically observed structures of resistance. This is not just a theoretical issue, because positions like Bhabha's are gaining political influence as a side-effect of their academic credibility. In practice, poststructuralist/identitarian critics of anarchism and autonomism frequently seek to attack, belittle, and prohibit the joyous affects of rebellion, preferring Calvinistic affects such as "responsibility", passive receptivity, insufficiency, and a longing for self-change (e.g. Soula M., 2011; Eisenstadt, 2013; Lagalisse, 2010; Critchley, 2011). In practice, this line of critique fuels a politics of *ressentiment*, guilt, shame, and fraternity-terror (see Dragonowl, 2016; Landstreicher, 2005; Gelderloos, 2010b). The attempt to impose reactive affects based on an ontology of lack reinforces the affectively destructive force of neoliberalism, and has a corrosive impact on the transformative power of social movements.

Mikhail Bakhtin briefly receives a similar treatment in the piece 'Opening the Floodgates'. Bakhtin is a theorist who values dialogue and multiple voices in texts. Bhabha objects to his distinction between monological poetry and potentially dialogical prose. This seems to Bhabha to promote the European literary form of the novel. According to Bhabha, 'Bakhtin seems to resist the possibilities of a language game where the rhetoric of orality is strategically effective precisely because it confuses the "reference" of the written' (OF, 185). In other words, Bhabha thinks Bakhtin denies a type of double-voicedness where writing is internally subverted by the act of writing or reading. This reflects a deeper disagreement. Bakhtin conceives the flow of multiplicity as historical, not linguistic. He is interested in the ways texts can express the multiple voices interacting in history. He is interested in multiple voices mainly in terms of multiple points of view. Bhabha is interested in a repetitive process of internal self-subversion of language. He replaces history with a timeless space in which endless language-play takes place. Hence, Bhabha is committed to the idea that double-voicedness *does not require an actual dialogue*. It can be carried out in the form of a monologue. This is impossible for Bakhtin. As so often, Bhabha evades the theoretical disagreement by simply accusing Bakhtin of denial. One can also compare here Bhabha's hostile replies to the artist Jitish Kallat (PN3; see above, 128-30), in which Bhabha clearly violates his prohibition on avenging angels swooping in with truths from the outside.

Bhabha has also repeatedly engaged with the work of anti-colonial writer Frantz Fanon. Fanon is a difficult figure for Bhabha. On the one hand, he is far too 'Manichean', binarising, and 'humanistic'. He believes in universal liberation, and he believes in militant struggle as a means to such liberation. On the other hand, his anti-colonial theory is both a political forerunner of postcolonial theory and an important source of its psychological ideas. Fanon is a psychoanalyst, and he is interested in the everyday politics of social meanings, but he does not treat society as a text and does not emphasise constitutive ambiguity or textual subversion. Rather, he treats colonialism as a system based on violence. Nonetheless, he is in many ways the founder of the tradition to which Bhabha belongs.

This leads to a recurring ambiguity, which Bhabha manages in a similar way to the less central dispute with Deleuze and Guattari. He splits Fanon's work into a good Fanon and a bad Fanon. He oscillates between misreading Fanon as a pure Derridean/Lacanian and denouncing him for not being. Bhabha likes Fanon's work as long as it is broadly compatible with Lacan and Derrida. When necessary, he tweaks his reading of Fanon's to bring Fanon into line with his own ontology. But when Fanon deviates too far from the Lacanian script, Bhabha denounces him as humanist, banal, teleological and so on. For example, Bhabha claims that Fanon's insistence on the 'open door of every consciousness' is a retreat from his recognition of the 'dark side of man'. The pessimistic side of Fanon's work is his 'most radical' moment. His more affirmative positions are a pathologically-motivated retreat from this position (LC, 61). Fanon is "radical", and positively valued, as long as he is negativity-mongering, but a dangerous adversary when his emancipatory project is also taken into account.

In the Margins: Frantz Fanon

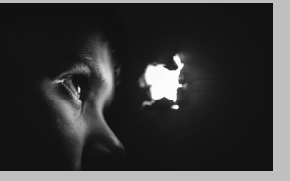
Frantz Fanon was born in Martinique, a French colony in the Caribbean with a black majority. He moved to Paris where he worked as a psychoanalyst, and was influenced by Sartre and Lacan. He then moved to Algeria, which was a French colony at the time. He eventually joined the National Liberation Front (FLN), a guerrilla army fighting against the French occupation of Algeria. Fanon was seriously injured in an explosion and almost assassinated while receiving hospital treatment. In his short life, Fanon wrote two books, and a number of articles which are collected in a further two volumes in English translation.

In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon explores the psychoanalytic structure of colonialism, racism, and black people's experiences in the French empire. He analyses racism and racial identity as if they are collective

mental illnesses. The contact of black people with white power-structures has similar effects to the childhood traumas studied in psychoanalysis. Fanon's example is a child reacting in fear to seeing a "Negro" in public. The child's frightened reaction interpellates Fanon with a series of stereotypes established by the "white gaze" – as angry, threatening, criminal, cannibalistic, and so on. He is reduced, in the other's gaze, to just his skin colour. This arises from the "bad faith" – the refusal of existential freedom – of white people.

Fanon believes that such interpellations are internalised. At a subjective level, black people are split between their body and their personal history. Black people objectify themselves in line with white stereotypes. They experience trauma from being recognised only in terms of skin colour, and seen as absolutely other. Stereotypes also assign people to particular, restrictive social roles. During his education, Fanon had come to believe in European reason. But he encountered irrational prejudice and irrationally rigid categories among white Europeans. The solution to this problem, according to Fanon, is to destroy rigid, irrational stereotypes. To overcome racialised alienation, both races need to disalienate themselves. They need to stop seeing themselves in terms of their stereotypical or aggregate differences from one another. Black people, in particular, need to cast off their white masks and see themselves as full human beings, irreducible to the white gaze and to all stereotypes.

Fanon pioneered the analysis of "Manichean" or binary categories in European thought, which is so important to Bhabha's project. According to Fanon, "blackness", or the identity of black people, is divided against itself. Black people, especially educated *évolués* like Fanon, have a split identity. They act and speak in different ways with white and black people.



This leads to profound self-alienation. Western culture establishes concepts and categories which treat white, European attributes and ideas as superior to other cultures or as universally human. As a result, black people desire to be white. They try to reach standards of universal value, which are really standards of white acceptance. But this is impossible. It causes black people to feel inferior and frustrated. Because they try to conform to white "universal" standards, black people abandon their own cultures, languages and heritage. *Évolués* in particular end up rejected by both worlds – not "white" enough to be accepted in Europe, but mocked and rejected as posers by other black people.

While he uses psychoanalysis, Fanon was also influenced by existentialism. In Sartre's words, 'existence precedes essence'. People should be existentially free and responsible for choosing a life-path in line with their authentic selves. In Fanon's theory, stereotypes are ways to impose an 'essence'. Stereotypes assert that someone has to be a certain way. According to stereotypes, a black person must always be primitive, a thug, and so on. These categories are ways of imprisoning people in categories and denying them their existential freedom. Fanon seeks to move from reification – treating people as objects – to realisation – living to one's full human potential. In contrast with Bhabha, Fanon criticises inbetweenness as creating alienation and blunting antagonism. Inbetweenness characterises, not the oppressed, but the intermediate middle-class groups who are used to manage the oppressed. In Fanon's account, Bhabha's mimic men are both duped by colonialism and complicit in its reproduction. Their role is to reproduce oppression down through the levels of a hierarchically arranged system in which they occupy the middle positions. Against such ambiguous subversion, Fanon calls for decisive acts of refusal which assert one's position as radically other, not as inbetween. This might mean refusing to conform to stereotypes, or radically confronting the colonial system.

In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon argues for the revolutionary struggles of colonised peoples. Unlike European capitalism, colonial rule is based on raw domination. Power is not disguised behind ideological fronts. Instead, it is exercised through the production of despair and terror. People are not so much induced to support the regime as to remain passive through exhaustion, depression and fear. Only colonisers and their elite allies are convinced by any kind of official ideology. They see themselves as endlessly restraining the violence and self-destructiveness of the colonised. The colonial world is divided, spatially and subjectively, into rigid categories. Existence is mistaken for essence, effect is mistaken for cause. Because of segregation and inequality, colonised people live in poorer and more chaotic areas than colonisers.

This is perceived as an effect of their nature. Hence, colonisers see colonised people as a threat, akin to wild animals, hostile landscapes, or infectious diseases. They put up walls and other security measures to keep the threat at bay. (Today this manifests as securitisation). Colonised people dream of reversing the roles. However, revolution destroys the coloniser's social place – it does not reverse the roles.

The most controversial part of the book argues that anti-colonial violence is a self-liberating response to colonialism through which colonised peoples recover their humanity and agency. The colonial structure is itself inherently violent. It permits constant, downward violence by white colonisers and agents of the state. And it gives constant signals to the colonised to "be ready to fight". This structure injects violent affects into the bodies and minds of colonised people. When these affects don't find an outlet in anti-colonial resistance, they are vented instead in displaced forms such as ethnic conflict, gang violence, hypersensitivity to slights, random killing sprees, and self-hatred.

For Fanon, violence is not so much a justified response as a necessary effect. Through anti-colonial violence, people reclaim the violence of the colonial context and use it to break colonialism. Anti-colonial rebels decide to make themselves agents of history. Their violence asserts that their lives are worth as much as those of settlers. It frees them from their inferiority complex, depression, and passivity. It makes colonisers seem less powerful, less superhuman. It also unblocks energies which have become trapped in the

body. It is economically costly and colonial powers will often initiate pacted transitions rather than risk such costs. Also, guerrilla war breaks down the spatial boundaries on which colonialism depends. Fanon's analysis of the psychological effects of physical resistance seems to be confirmed by studies of revolution. For example, Elizabeth Wood's (2001) study of peasant revolutionaries in El Salvador largely confirms Fanon's account. People perceive themselves as having stood up to oppression and become agents for the first time.

However, Fanon also warns of the pitfalls of anti-colonial revolution. He raises concerns about neo-colonialism, economic dependency, corrupt rulers, new forms of oppression, ethnic conflict, and ignorance. Fanon calls for revolution to be followed by bottom-up power for the dispossessed. If the root issues of land, food and dignity are not resolved, nations will devolve back into everyday violence. An elite will come to occupy the place of the former colonisers, reversing or displacing the old colonial roles rather than overcoming them. For example, the dictatorship of city over countryside will be perpetuated. He also expresses scepticism towards pacted transitions, which do not involve the necessary psychological transformation involved in decolonisation. Indeed, violence is important to undermine local elite imitators of the colonisers, as much as to undermine colonialism.

In some respects, Fanon is closer to a Marxist model than a language model of power. Capitalism depends on colonialism, and local elites perpetuate the subordination of the poor so as to continue capitalist plunder. Fanon believes that decolonisation struggles were betrayed. Colonial powers granted some countries independence to avoid the costs of war – but they carried on economic exploitation the same way as before. The new postcolonial elite became complicit in this process of extraction and often became very corrupt. This was a betrayal of the process of decolonisation, which needs to be continued after independence as a struggle for economic liberation and political decentralisation.

Fanon calls for a kind of socialism, but not the kind promoted by other anti-colonial nationalists. The most important contradiction in colonial contexts is race, not class. The peasants and the poor (the so-called lumpenproletariat) tend to remain outside the imported capitalist class structure. They live mainly in what are today termed the subsistence and informal sectors. These sectors are the spearhead of revolution. This is seen today, for example, in the Arab Spring, Occupy Nigeria, or the South African informal settlements movement, where the so-called "restive youth stratum" are often the most militant participants. For Fanon, the land question has particular importance. Colonised peoples are not so much exploited in the workplace as denied work and land. Fanon also believes that military metaphors are largely useless in dealing with economic issues.

Unlike Bhabha, Fanon has a distinct transformative project. It is focused on Third World liberation. The contradiction between Third World and richer countries is more important than the East-West conflict. Projects such as the arms race need to end. Instead, money should be funnelled into developing the poorer parts of the world. Third World peoples will move beyond the capitalism and socialism of Europe to find their own values, methods, and styles. For Fanon, this will involve a revolutionary humanism. Fanon is concerned about the role of "native intellectuals" like himself. On the one hand, they are necessary to organise and integrate the liberation struggle. On the other, they are products of colonialism and capitalism. They need to re-educate and remake themselves to become part of the national struggle. Fanon seems to see collectivism, and obtaining meaning in a collective struggle, as central to this remaking.

Contact with and subordination to "the people" is also a means to guarantee against revolutionary parties becoming social-control machines. Fanon also emphasised the importance of simple language. Intellectuals who use unnecessary jargon reproduce colonial power. He also tends, however, to be dismissive of "superstitions" he considers premodern or irrational. He sees them mainly as safety-valves or mystification, rather than as forms of resistance.

Fanon portrays national revolution in almost apocalyptic terms. A new earth, and a new humanity are born. Revolutionary violence is a part of the process of purging the old and giving birth to the new. Fanon's work is awash with optimistic visions of where the trends emerging in the revolutionary process will lead. In retrospect, this seems naïve. In reality, a new master-signifier

(the nation) hegemonised by the armed group itself usually becomes the centre of a new authoritarian system. The old categories are partially replaced and overcome, but the new ones are just as rigid. The resultant disillusionment fuelled critiques like Bhabha's, which suspect any revolutionary shift of simply entrenching the rigidity of categories. But what if the failure was not inevitable? What if it arose – not from the nature of language itself – but from the flaws of nationalist ideology, the privileging of the military, or the subsequent recuperation of the post-revolutionary state by global capital?

Although he uses some of its methods and concepts, Fanon is critical of psychoanalysis because of its universalising claims. He believes that psychological problems can only be understood on the basis of each particular culture. The Oedipus complex does not arise in colonised countries. Fanon criticised the psychoanalyst Mannoni who saw phallic imagery and the like in

colonised people's dreams, rather than references to the colonial trauma. He would doubtless have similarly rejected Bhabha's importation of Lacanian categories without regard for local situations. According to Fanon, Jung's collective unconscious – a set of myths and images accessible to individuals' fantasies – is more relevant than the Oedipus complex in contexts like Martinique. Stereotypes (including those arising in the media) cast black and white people in roles related to myths – hero, shadow, tyrant, king, and so on. For example, white Europeans fear black people as symbols of sexual potency and evil. These stereotypes involve projection of unconscious aspects of white people's psychologies. For example, white people identify with the mind, and disavow the body. As a result, attributes of bodily power – large penises, athleticism, promiscuity, violence, rage – are projected onto black people. White people treat black people as if they actually have, or live by, attributes white people desire, yet repress in themselves.

Fanon's cultural studies mostly focus on the shifting political meanings of everyday objects and practices. For example, Fanon argues that the hijab, or veil, worn by some Algerian women underwent sharp changes in its political meaning. Initially it signified modesty. For colonisers, however, it was a frustrating and sexually arousing barrier which must conceal something to be seized. Rape was usually preceded by forced unveiling. Colonial authorities sought to suppress the veil as a symbol of women's subordination. But colonised people rejected such strategies because they saw unveiling as laying them bare to colonisers. Algerian traditions hardened. The veil came to symbolise nationalism and religion. When the war of independence started, veiled women were seen as likely rebels. This meant that rebel women started to discard their veils and dress in European clothes to evade suspicion. But the colonisers became aware of this strategy. At this point, rebel women instead adopted ultra-traditional dress, including long robes and veils. This again evaded suspicion – and was a handy way to conceal contraband. This strategic play of moves and counter-moves is also visible in all the topics in *Dying Colonialism* – such as the changing meanings of radios and newspaper readership, medicine, and the family. For Fanon, these strategic shifts were Hegelian dialectical progressions.

Fanon is influenced by Lacan and Hegel, and makes a lot of use of the master-slave dialectic and the mirror stage in his work. But he is also influenced by existentialism and its central idea of human existential freedom. This is the idea that individual people have a natural subjective freedom and responsibility to self-determine what they are and how they will live their lives. Colonialism is offensive to Fanon because it blocks people from fully exercising their existential freedom. Existentialists criticise social roles in general. For example, Sartre wrote a scathing critique of the activity of waiters. *Black Skin, White Masks* draws heavily on Sartre's work on anti-Semitism, which similarly argued that the sense of Jewishness is an effect of internalising stereotypes. Colonialism is a particularly rigid system of racial roles backed up by violence. This is why anti-colonial liberation is also a path to general human freedom. Ultimately Europeans also need to be part of this process. It culminates in the valuation of all humans and not only Europeans, and in all humans throwing off outer "determination" or subordination to social roles. People should seek to escape social roles and stereotypes, not because this subverts power, but because it is necessary in order to be free.

In existentialism, someone is alienated if they are unable to live out their existential freedom, for example because of neurotic compulsions or external constraints. Colonialism was a condition of generalised alienation. Fanon saw psychiatry and psychoanalysis as aiming to disalienate people from themselves. Other existential psychologists included Viktor Frankl, a Holocaust survivor who believed it was possible to find meaning and purpose in any conditions, and Abraham Maslow, who argued that self-actualisation and peak experience are the ultimate goals of life. A self-actualised person realises their full

potential, is sceptical of social conventions, and lives by an independent sense of their life-purpose and "truth". (Fanon effectively portrayed revolutionary violence as a form of self-actualisation). Existentialist psychology still exists, although some of its variants are now tied-up with neoliberal versions of the idea of self-expression. Few existential psychologists are also psychoanalysts. There are serious philosophical disagreements between existentialism and Lacanian theory, and between existentialism and Derridean deconstruction. These are focused on existentialism's positive sense of inner meaning and self-directed human life, which Lacan and Derrida see as a harmful fantasy.

Authors like Bhabha are allergic to phrases such as 'full human potential' and 'self-actualisation'. They do not wish to overcome alienation. They believe it cannot be overcome, and the attempt to overcome it leads to fixed rigid meanings.

His existentialist "humanist" position rendered Fanon sceptical of racially-based liberation movements such as the *Négritude* movement. However, he saw such movements as a necessary 'antithesis' to the dominant 'thesis'. To overcome the master-slave dialectic, black people do not need to be given abstract freedom, such as national independence. They need to take an active role in achieving freedom. In Hegelian terms, black identity politics is a necessary step towards an eventual synthesis where race no longer matters. Revolutionary politics is a higher synthesis of the assimilation of European culture by *évolués* with the glorification of tradition by *Négritude*. This is a classic Hegelian argument, where thesis and antithesis are overcome in synthesis.

However, Fanon constantly battles with the question of how to reach a non-Manichean world by Manichean means. He usually answers the question by focusing on chosen political positions, rather than "essential" identities. People are friends or enemies depending on the side they choose, not their socially-imposed identities. Even a French settler in Algeria can be redeemed by siding with the oppressed. This is similar to the Maoist idea of the "principal contradiction". People's alignment on the principal issue outweighs their social position and their stances on other issues, because the principal issue is the one which decides the course of history at a particular moment.

What Bhabha likes about Fanon is his use of psychoanalysis in a colonial context. He argues that Fanon questions both individual and social authority, or sovereignty. He doesn't attribute colonialism to individual agency. Instead, he locates the experience of cultural alienation in psychoanalytic categories (LC, 43). On an explanatory level, this is similar to Bhabha's approach. Using Fanon, Bhabha argues against the view that the interests of a social group can ground political authority. Instead, authority is always an effect of alienation and aggression (LC, 43). Despite appearances, this is not necessarily an argument against authority as such. Discussing violence in the work of Fanon, Bhabha argues that it is not a way of choosing between two binary poles. Rather, it is a form of 'psycho-affective survival' as an objectified subject in a condition of life-in-death (Byrne, 2009:145). In this way, Bhabha explains Fanon's arguments for violence without endorsing the binary reasoning they contain.

In 'Remembering Fanon', Bhabha argues against Fanon's humanism, but for his analysis of antagonism. On Bhabha's reading of Fanon, the colonial situation undermines the ideas of 'Man' and 'Society' as substantial entities (RF, 119). Fanon's existentialist rejection of colonialism because it interferes with substantial existential freedom is abandoned by Bhabha. In his Foreword to Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth*, Bhabha takes on a project of trying to 'save' elements of Fanon's project (RF, xi). It is not clear whether they are being saved from the failure or degeneration of 'Third World' revolutions, or from Bhabha's own 'anti-essentialism'. The latter requires that much of Fanon be discarded, and Bhabha is careful to salvage only what can be assimilated to his own project - much as he accuses colonisers of doing. Bhabha's Fanon is not so much a revolutionary as a deconstructor. The valued parts of Fanon's work are those which reappropriate and subvert the language of modernity (RF, xxi). For Bhabha, the message of Fanon's work is not revolutionary struggle. It is a 'quieter, more contemplative' message of ambiguity, and an abstract hope for freedom (RF, xli). The Algerian conflict is reduced to Bhabha's usual accounts of colonialism. For example, France gazed on its 'mirror image' in Algeria, and Fanon exposed the 'abiding instability' of colonialism (RF, xxii). Fanon also warned against the neocolonial bourgeoisie who later betrayed his project (RF, xxvii).

Hence, Fanon's message is interpreted as a variant of Bhabha's: colonialism is ambivalent, unstable, and exposes the incompleteness of the modern/colonial subject. In many ways, this suppresses the philosophical basis of Fanon's work. Critics such as Neil Lazarus (1993) and Abdul JanMohamed (1983), as well as Benita Parry (2004; see below, 890-907), object to Bhabha's reading of Fanon as a misreading. Bhabha's reading is taken to deradicalise Fanon's work. Cedric Robinson (1993:79) accuses literary theorists, including Bhabha, of 'implicat[ing] an imagined Fanon in their self-referential debates on colonial discourse'. He and labels this 'appropriation' – the usual name for the colonial or hegemonic capture of black, indigenous, or marginalised people's cultures.

Fanon was a trained psychoanalyst and was certainly influenced by Lacan. But his overarching political project involves an attempt to disalienate humanity through the overthrow of colonialism and racism. The struggle against colonialism is part of the process of humanisation, through which people gain space to exercise existential freedom as theorised by Sartre. The idea of existential freedom depends on precisely the kind of autonomous 'subject' which Bhabha denies. For Fanon, existential authenticity remains the goal of liberation. He speaks of the search for a 'whole man' even in his later works. This is an existentialist vision, drawing on the work of Sartre. For existentialists, someone is dehumanised if they are reduced to a social role or position. People need to be able to define their own subjectivities, projects and ways of life, without being constrained by external power-structures such as colonialism and racism. The point is to overthrow colonialism so as to return to authenticity. For Bhabha (and Derrida, and Spivak, and Lacan), on the other hand, authenticity is both impossible and undesirable. The 'subject' or self is constitutively split. The traumatic incompleteness of the subject is something to be welcomed and celebrated, not overcome.

According to Bhabha, Fanon 'may yearn for the total transformation of Man and Society, but he speaks most effectively from the uncertain interstices of historical change' (LC, 40). His search for disalienation is necessarily 'doomed'. But it opens up interesting discussions about ambivalence (LC, 41). Fanon is 'too quick to name the Other', too prone to return

his psychoanalytic accounts to their 'proper political time and place', and afflicted by a 'deep hunger' for 'banal' and 'beatific' humanism. For Bhabha, this 'blunts the edge' of Fanon's analysis (LC, 60-1). He adds that 'there can be no reconciliation, no Hegelian recognition, no... humanistic "world of the You"'. There can only be shifts in Manichean binaries from within, using ambivalence (LC, 62). Bhabha's gesture of splitting is clear. The good Fanon is the psychoanalytic Fanon, the analyst of insoluble aporias of identity. The bad Fanon is the activist Fanon, who seeks disalienation. Bhabha sees a contradiction within Fanon's work. Fanon's humanist aspirations contradict his Manichean analysis of colonial binaries. In fact, a *desire* for disalienation and belief in its possibility is quite compatible with a *belief* that the present is alienated.

Bhabha's Fanon is a critic of the idea of 'Man'. Fanon's 'Man' is necessarily racialised. He destroys humanist ontology (LC, 238). This seems a dubious reading, given Fanon's existentialism. When Fanon writes, 'there is not merely one Negro, there are *Negroes*', he seems to be insisting that individuals are irreducible to categories. His approach is similar to Barthes's or Korzybski's: each member of the extensional set "Negroes" is irreducible to stereotypes of blackness. However, Bhabha wants Fanon to mean anything but this. 'This is emphatically not a postmodern celebration of pluralistic identities... [Instead] the project of modernity is itself rendered... contradictory and unresolved' (LC, 238). Fanon is valuable for Bhabha mainly in subverting the modern/colonial project. The nature of his alternative to this project is not so helpful for Bhabha. He needs to turn Fanon into a lackist.

Hence, Bhabha moulds a mirror image of himself, into which he inserts cherry-picked snippets of Fanon's thought. But he rejects other aspects of Fanon's work. For example, nationalism is outdated. It is now seen through the 'back mirror', after globalisation (RF, xi). Fanon overestimated the peasantry, and indigenous identity. For Bhabha, this was due to psychological factors (RF, xxxii). Colonisation now takes the forms of debt dependency and a global dual economy (RF, xii). This dual economy is wrongly celebrated as a global economy (RF, xviii). Although Fanon talks about the debt trap and economic imperialism in *The Wretched of the Earth*, Bhabha views him as unable to explain post-independence regimes of control. There are also other ways in which Fanon is no longer relevant according to Bhabha. For instance, 'Third World' subjectivity is only possible outside of 'peremptory and polarising' Cold War alternatives (RF, xiv). It is thus supposedly no longer possible today.

This critique leads to a particular analysis of contemporary global problems. Bhabha frames the global South as a field of complexity, which disrupts the simple story of the end of the Cold War (RF, xv). Denied their right to development, the global poor are caught in a 'zone of psycho-affectivity' which echoes Fanon's 'horrifying call to violence'

(RF, xxviii). This discussion would have provided a good starting-point to think about the 'restive youth stratum' and the politics of the excluded (see Clover, 2016; Karatasli et al., 2015; Robinson, 2010). Instead, Bhabha traces a series of increasingly tangential connections between Fanon and various historical figures: the Black Panthers, Steve Biko, Bobby Sands, and finally, the 9/11 attackers (xxviii-xxx). The last of these is linked to Fanon only because a US leader mentioned *The Wretched of the Earth* in explaining the supposed fearlessness of America's enemies. This is an example of the propaganda technique of 'transfer' or 'association', where something is put alongside an emotionally charged image, object or person so as to transfer some of the praise or blame to it. It basically functions as a moral condemnation of Fanon's militancy, by reference to conventional reactions to recent events.

Bhabha also seeks to project a kind of guilt-by-association onto Fanon in relation to later dictatorships and civil wars in Algeria. Algeria became a one-party state under FLN rule after independence, and suffered an extremely brutal civil war between the FLN/army and Islamist rebels following democratisation in the early 1990s. Bhabha argues, in a dehistoricised way, that a state built on FLN violence would resultantly slide more easily into state terror and religious fanaticism because of its violent origins (RF, xxxi-ii). Fanon's almost religious ideas of revolution trigger wariness of ethnoreligious conflict on Bhabha's part (RF, ix), though Fanon's criticisms of empty national shells and narrow-minded nationalism also suggest concern to avoid such conflicts (RF, xvi). According to Bhabha, Fanon's position thus implicitly explains later events in Algeria.

But this seems an overly simplistic explanation. Many countries which had peaceful decolonisation processes, such as Nigeria and Côte d'Ivoire, have also suffered dictatorship, state terror, civil war and ethnoreligious violence. Such patterns stem from the complicity of the postcolonial state elite and its cronies in resource extraction, and resultant zero-sum competition for state-captured resources which encourage the state to close the political space (Kasfir, 1976; Beckman, 2004). Armed movements which seize

power often degenerate into dictatorships. However, this does not necessarily reflect an issue with "violence" in the abstract, so much as a problem with a distinct military way of seeing. It would make more sense to look more concretely at the army-form, and its substitutionism relative to the 'nation', as the source of dictatorship – a position which similarly indicts militarism in the west (c.f. Virilio, 1990; Bakunin, 1990/1873).

The link between Fanon and 'fanaticism' is particularly dubious, and the attempt to trace a line from Fanon to bin Laden is particularly absurd. It seems designed as a *denkverbot*, an order not to think. Bhabha is implying that Fanon's views on violence are just too dangerous to be taken seriously. But in Algeria, political Islam arose as a resistance movement *against* FLN rule, not as an effect of it. Globally, political Islam arose largely because of the failure of anti-colonial nationalism (including pan-Arab nationalism), filling an important political void. It has political and class contexts, including inter-elite competition (Devji, 2005; Wiktorowitz, 2005; Daher, 2016a). In ignoring these structural sources, Bhabha reproduces simplistic Orientalist ideas of political Islam as an upsurge in fanaticism and a culture of violence. The implied order not to think, the 'denkverbot', in Bhabha's account thus resonates closely with later 'conveyor-belt' theories of terrorism which are today fashionable in counterinsurgency (COIN) discourse. These theories fuel Islamophobic initiatives such as the Prevent strategy. In a COIN reading of Bhabha, Fanon is dangerous because he promotes views which could 'radicalise' and 'glorify'

violence, leading to events such as 9/11. These aspects of Fanon's work should therefore be silenced. It is worrying how little work it takes to force Bhabha into such a discourse.

Having effectively denounced Fanon's views on violence, Bhabha then turns face and accuses supporters of nonviolence of indulging their privilege (RF, xxxvi). According to Bhabha, Enlightenment nonviolence is built on colonial violence. This reflects the standard argument that every signifier requires its other (see Chapter 2). Fanonian violence is a 'struggle for psycho-affective survival' and 'human agency' (RF, xxxvi). The colonised are forced into anxious defensiveness, maintaining ego-defences and looking for hostile signals from the surrounding world (RF, ix). However, Bhabha treats Fanon's indignity, his anger against external oppression, as the source of his mistaken commitment to violence. Violence arises from a mirage. The oppressed see their desires reflected in the other, but cannot 'slake their thirst' (RF, xl). This reading makes sense, given Bhabha's general assumptions: antagonism and oppression are internal contradictions of a holistic field of textuality, the 'other' is not really separate from the 'self', the way to resist is not binary antagonism but displacement and negotiation.

It seems to me, however, that a politics with no space for anger is necessarily a politics of the included. In his discussion of Fanon, Bhabha seems to deny that there is an element of external, coercive control in colonialism. He seems to deny that people subject to oppression should ever draw a line between themselves and the oppressor, set limits or resist. He seems to deny that antagonistic social struggle can ever have positive effects. From a 'psycho-affective' point of view, he aligns himself against projectile affects of struggle, even against principled nonviolence, and for a passive but manipulative stance within dominant structures. It is unclear, however, why the violence discussed by Fanon is different from violence Bhabha celebrates – such as infanticide and murder as forms of resistance to slavery, or the panic caused by the Indian 'Mutiny'. Perhaps it is not violence itself, but empowered anger which Bhabha dislikes. Perhaps violence becomes more tolerable to Bhabha the more historically removed it is.

Bhabha's swingeing rejection of projectile affects such as anger is politically disempowering. It is based on a simplistic conflation of all forms of passionate politics with the specific affective structure of racism and colonialism. Social movements can have messianic, quasi-religious characteristics without being ethnoreligious. This kind of effect is typical of the bund as social formation (see Robinson, 2018a; Peterson, 2001), which is the most viable alternative to hierarchical power. Ethnonationalism in different contexts – Bhabha mentions Rwanda, Bosnia, and Gujarat among others – has social, political and historical dimensions. It makes little sense to comment on such matters without considering the legitimation problems facing local elites, the 'restive youth problem', the use of politicised ethnicity to construct patronage networks in neopatrimonial states, the decline of secular nationalism, the anxieties caused by precarity and 'globalisation', the role of ethnicity as a site of reciprocity and everyday survival networks, or the geopolitical moves of various actors. Ethnoreligious violence is not simply an unfolding of a narrative problem, which can somehow be traced to the limits of Fanon's (or anyone else's) theoretical texts.

Bhabha follows through the implications of his critique of anger and violence in his political writings. In 'Untimely Ends', Bhabha criticises Saïd for failing to condemn Palestinian violence and for taking sides in the struggle between Palestinian political movements and the settler-colonial state of Israel. Bhabha's preferred position is always in the interstices between the two sides. He suggests that Palestinian violence is a strategy of internal power within the Palestinian camp. Both sides, Israeli and Palestinian, succumb to

nationalism and purism. He also argues that Saïd has too much 'rage', which drives him towards a 'dark two-dimensionality' (UE, 20). Prohibited emotions lead to prohibited political effects. These prohibited effects render Bhabha's antagonists largely equivalent to one another. Indeed, Bhabha writes in a way which treats Israel and Palestine as largely equivalent - both driven by the same logic of antagonistic subject-formation. In short, Bhabha seems unable to take sides against colonialism in practice because of the liberal parameters of his theory and his rejection of antagonistic approaches.

Bhabha's criticisms of Fanon are revealing, in relation to his basic philosophy. Firstly, Bhabha's consistent preference for pessimistic, grimdark conclusions over those which allow for the possibility of liberation reflects the basic conservatism of his worldview. If the 'noblebright' splitting of the field into good and bad is potentially violent, so too is the 'grimdark' positing of violence and suffering as unavoidable, and the resultant embrace of 'messy' anti-hero antics and messy compromises with necessity ('getting one's hands dirty'). The 'grimdark' actor can attribute their violence to their context, and claim to act 'perversely' on behalf of necessity, far more easily than the 'noblebright' actor. Indeed, such justifications function much the same way that Bhabha justifies his propagandistic discourse by its utility in subverting western reason.

Secondly, Bhabha's determination to reduce even such a theorist as Fanon, who is so close to his own position, to psychoanalytic categories of pathology the moment he violates certain theoretical taboos is indicative of the thought-closing, discussion-impeding logic of the variety of poststructuralism Bhabha exemplifies. In theory, one respects 'otherness'. In practice, if the other disagrees, one does not dialogue respectfully with their position, or recognise its legitimacy as a form of difference. One does not even try to falsify the other's point of view, to show why they are wrong. Instead, one bombards them with anathematising labels, used like coshes to beat down the opposing position. If someone disagrees, they are portrayed as if they are naïve, passé, dangerous, purist, and of little theoretical significance. By the end, there is not much "difference" left.

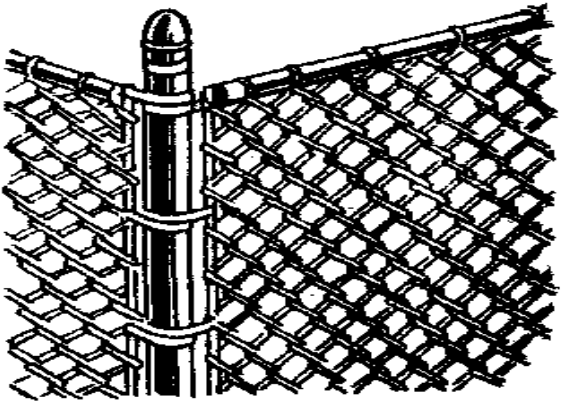
Bhabha on Multiculturalism and Identity Politics

Bhabha is clearly connected to multicultural, identity-based movements. However, he also carefully differentiates his own position from theirs – mainly because his theory of ambiguity precludes definite identity. Hence, he criticises multiculturalism, feminism and 'race relations' theory as based on an essentialist idea of a 'turn or return to ourselves'. He also criticises mutual recognition and social dialogue as effects of this view (MM, 449). For Bhabha, multiculturalism is wrong because it sees subjectivity as expressive – as emerging from within. In other words, it assumes that people have some kind of inner substance which they express in identity. Instead, Bhabha believes people are co-constituted and therefore haunted by ambiguity (see above, 119-20). He maintains that the

subject is structured *between* subject-positions, so that subjectivities are co-constituted. This is in line with the Lacanian view that subjectivity is constructed as an identity in relation to the other. The other is extimate or proximate, not simply different. Multiculturalism is a variety of "diversity" rather than "difference" (see Chapter 9) and identity politics is similarly either "diversity" or antagonistic politics.

Bhabha particularly argues against the type of identity politics which seeks an originary identity outside the relationship with the colonial or racist antagonist. For example, he opposes forms of anti-colonial politics which look for a pre-colonial tradition or an identity outside colonialism. Such an identity is impossible. There can be no access to an originary identity or received tradition (LC, 2). This effectively prohibits a particular kind of claim, which relies on one term in a dominant binary as a point of resistance. It is based on a valid concern about references to pure traditions which may never have existed, which can be used to subordinate people today (for example, in Hindu communalist and salafi Islamist movements). However, there is also a sense in which people *do* have access to something which is not the dominant text. This occurs when they inhabit two texts at once – for example, James Scott's hidden and public transcripts (Scott, 1990; see above, 504-17). If subaltern people (say, workers or peasants) have their own worldview and 'text', elaborated offstage and away from the viewpoint of elites, then Bhabha is wrong that they cannot refer to an identity outside the dominant tradition. There is not simply co-constitutivity within the dominant text, and subversion inside this text. There is a relation between two subjects who intersect at various points, but who also inhabit different social worlds.

Bhabha's rejection of any idea of an 'outside' is criticised by a number of scholars. For example, Nicholas Thomas suggests that Bhabha ignores the possibility that subaltern people have their own representations. These representations might ignore dominant colonial texts, and might not view mimicry as a necessary capitulation (1994:57). Similarly, Meagan Vaughan accuses postcolonialism of ignoring and negating the pre-colonial (1994:7). In other words, authors like Bhabha write as if pre-colonial cultures, and their residues or continuations today, do not exist at all. The colonised are simply a term in the dominant, western discourse. In many ways, this reinforces the effects of colonial power in wiping out alternative discourses.



Bhabha situates the issue of multiculturalism as an issue in the history of minority movements. Theory in the 1980s-90s has occupied 'border posts' in academic disciplines. This strategy was necessitated by the 'culture wars' – a set of struggles over the representation of society in academic canons (MM, 433). The culture wars tended to create two extreme, rival positions of majority nationalism and minority essentialism. The 'moderate minority position', with which Bhabha identifies, instead requires an inbetween space (MM, 434). Bhabha dislikes the prevalence of antagonistic politics in minority movements. He complains that minority identities have often emerged in 'enraged' rather

than 'engaged' ways. This happens because such identities are related to a political choice to affiliate to new social movements or to exclusionary causes (MM, 435). However, boundaries between identities are becoming blurred, because internal exclusions increasingly replace external boundaries (MM, 436).

Bhabha also writes of an emerging antagonism between a global underclass and a global privileged class (MM, 437). However, this does not seem to affect his totalising view of an all-encompassing structure. In another piece, Bhabha analyses Hindu communalism as a modernist movement which copies European nationalisms (SPD, 383). He discusses racist and ethnic movements as not just instances of hatred, but also 'creating solidarity, creating a camp' (SPD, 387). According to Bhabha, the attempt to create fixed identities in a context of contingency and ambiguity leads to political formations of this kind.

Similar issues arise in Bhabha's engagement with theories of whiteness. In his discussion of whiteness studies, Bhabha agrees with the view that whiteness poses as invisible. But he criticises Noel Ignatiev's project of abolishing whiteness. There are a number of reasons for this. Firstly, Bhabha sees power as dispersed and local, whereas Ignatiev assumes a kind of global design. Secondly, Bhabha is worried that 'abolishing' whiteness will simply render it invisible again. Whiteness will remain active under a different name, such as civility. And thirdly, Bhabha's standard hostility to radicals also applies to Ignatiev.

As with his other engagements with radicals, Bhabha's critique of Ignatiev is problematically propagandistic and awash with densely collocated boo-words. He accuses Ignatiev of an authoritarian, apocalyptic, statist, nationalist tone (WS, 24). But the passage he cites to support this is *not* authoritarian. Rather, it refers to disalienation: ceasing to be white so as to 'become freely associated, developing human beings' (cited WS, 24). In other words, Ignatiev has a theory of free becoming. Like Fanon and Marx, he believes that people can develop freely provided they are not subject to oppressive social categories and regimes. Why does Bhabha hear disalienation as nationalism or authoritarianism? The answer is not clear. Possibly, he is reacting to angry and passionate affects which remind him of anti-colonial nationalism. Or, possibly, he is misconstruing Ignatiev's position so as to convince his readers. It seems that Bhabha can't read a confrontational political text without hearing essentialism, authoritarianism and nationalism. An entire field of dissident humanisms and theories of becoming are thus effectively ruled-out in advance, based on a misreading.

The underlying objection partially concealed behind Bhabha's boo-words is that Bhabha does not like either/or thought. He dislikes being unable to make a 'nuanced response', and being effectively forced to choose Ignatiev's position because the only recognised alternative is unchoosably bad (WS, 24). In other words, because Bhabha sees binary reasoning as the main enemy (though also as unavoidable), he rejects any kind of politics which is insufficiently vague or localised. His objection is to Ignatiev's tone as much as his content. His tone is pretty typical of radical theory. He seeks to locate and specify what he sees as oppression, and then reject it. Bhabha supposedly avoids such binarising. Yet he gets caught in a contradiction because he simultaneously uses and denounces, embraces and disavows binary thinking (see above, 251-8, 264-8). He does exactly what he criticises Ignatiev for, when he contrasts the 'messy mask of camouflage' with the 'avenging angel of truth' (above, 215, 819). Also, there is a certain doublethink in the insistence that refusing a particular theoretical shibboleth, and insisting on an open field, is actually authoritarian or closed-minded. On the contrary, Bhabha is being authoritarian in insisting that everyone must adopt his particular existential, almost theological position. He is using the signifier "authoritarian" as a boo-word, when it actually applies to him as a descriptive designation.

There is no necessary reason why the rejection of whiteness, or the pursuit of a process of free becoming, should be any more limiting than Bhabha's insistence on the recurring structure of the third space. In 'humanist' theories of becoming, what we *are* as freely developing beings – individually or collectively – is radically open. The only options closed-off by such a theory are the claim that we are already freely developing beings within capitalism, and the claim that we are defined by an essence. And these are not

options Bhabha would advocate in any case. Bhabha prefers theories which assume co-constitutivity, linguistic determinism, and constitutive ambivalence. But he is mistaken to assume that these theories are somehow less authoritarian or more open to difference than the alternatives. In any case, Ignatiev only forces the reader to adopt his position to the extent that his empirical and argumentative basis is valid. It is questionable whether there is anything objectionably authoritarian in claiming that certain premises entail certain conclusions. If such logical 'entailment' is objectionable, then it is also objectionable in Bhabha's writing. For instance, it is objectionable in the assumption that ambiguity is subversive in general, and therefore should be interpreted as subversive in colonial contexts. The vagueness of Bhabha's derivations does not make them any less restrictive.

However, there is something else which is implicitly denied in a theory of free becoming such as those of Deleuze/Guattari, Ignatiev, and Fanon. Bhabha seems to react most sharply to theories which challenge his insistence on the generative Lacanian/Derridean structure of subjectivity. In common with most radicals, Ignatiev implies that free becoming is possible once concrete barriers – oppressive structures like whiteness – are removed. For Bhabha, this is wrong, because the barrier to free becoming is constitutive of human agency. It is part of the logic of subject-formation, which *requires* alienation at the outset. As a result, for Bhabha, a move such as Ignatiev's (or Marx's, or Fanon's, or Deleuze's) denies the constitutive split. It tries to reject and overcome one half of the split, when this is actually the extimate other, thing, or supplement (see above, 326-30, 357-364). Such a move is authoritarian, apocalyptic, and essentialist. Through the mouth of another author, Bhabha rejects claims of the kind 'it's a black thing, you wouldn't understand' as 'essentialising blackness' (LC, 3).

Hence, it seems that, for Bhabha, *any* theory which seeks to overthrow a determinate oppression is authoritarian, apocalyptic, and essentialist. Bhabha's issue with Ignatiev is that he does not help to create an inbetween space. For Bhabha, creating an inbetween space is the only way to enact change. Because Bhabha believes the split between self and other is constitutive of the subject, any theory which tries to overthrow oppression is actually rejecting part of the self (the co-constituting other). It also rejects the constitutive nature of alienation – the very thing we need to accept and embrace. Hence, any radical theory is authoritarian because it seeks to keep this rejected part constantly repressed. Of course, this depends on the validity of Bhabha's initial assumption that outer conflicts reflect an underlying, constitutive split, rather than outer, contingent social relations. Bhabha is inclined to assert or assume, rather than show this.

Again on Bhabha's method of critique

We thus see, once more, an immense contradiction at the heart of Bhabha's engagement with opponents. He denounces Ignatiev for creating binaries, and for forcing a choice because the alternative is so bad. In principle, he advocates different approach. However, as we have seen, Bhabha struggles to maintain in his own work the non-commanding, 'translational' style he advocates (MM, 437). His insistence on translational discourse is principally exercised in his relationship to mainstream, capitalist and liberal views and systems. With radical opponents, his approach is extremely commanding and imperative, and does much the same that he criticises Ignatiev for. Bhabha creates binaries which

force a choice of his own position because the alternative is unchoosable. For example, Bhabha's rejection of 'unregulated open-endedness or the celebration of pluralism', as part of a straight choice between fantasy and truth (MM, 459), is exactly the kind of formulation he denounces in Ignatiev. We have seen the same with the 'avenging angel' quote, the association of Fanon with 9/11 and ethnic violence, and the misconstrual of Jameson as a teleological determinist.

Indeed, this rhetoric of forcing choices seems built into Bhabha's treatment of radical opponents. Much of his rhetoric – from the accusations of 'denial', 'disavowal' and 'foreclosure', to the constant deployment of boo- and hurrah-words – is constructed so as to preclude a sympathetic reader from making the opposite choice on vital questions. In these cases, there is usually no reasoning provided as to why one should accept Bhabha's point of view, besides not wishing to be labelled the wrong way. Bhabha might think that, in an ideal world, positions will be juxtaposed rather than enter into debates. But he does not perform this in his own practice. And if there must be debates, then personally, I would much rather deal with an opponent who derives their decisive conclusions from clear structural analysis than one who simply labels those who oppose their own positions.

In many respects, Bhabha's style of critique is very general. It does not require much engagement with particular opponents or texts. Instead, conclusions can be read-off by putting a text in one box or another – as appropriately ambivalent or problematically definite. If every identity is constitutively split, then any politics is necessarily futile and misguided (though it may remain necessary to keep engaging in futile political actions so as to maintain a socially effective illusion of identity). This is equally true, whether one is talking about Marxism, anarchism, feminism, ecology, liberalism, conservatism, or anti-colonial nationalism. It is equally true if Bhabha were to stumble upon some new philosophy or ideology he'd never come across before. He can apply broadly the same critique to Marx, Jameson, Deleuze/Guattari, Fanon, Ignatiev, multiculturalism, and liberalism, without any deep engagement with, or even need to ascertain the immanent structure of, the positions he criticises.

The truth of Bhabha's ontological assumptions is never at stake in his engagements with opponents. It is simply an *a priori* claim, which can be applied to cases but not altered by them. What's more, the futility of an approach can, in Bhabha's world, be derived

simplistically from first principles. It does not have to be shown in the case of each ideology or movement, because it is necessarily true, in advance. Bhabha thus sets up an unequal fight, where he can hurt the opponent, without being hurt in return. At the same time, he keeps contact with others safely contained behind a protective barrier of self-contained dogmas. He wears a theoretical condom, so to speak, but one which only works in one direction.

Critics Bite Back: Marxist and radical critiques of Bhabha and postcolonialism

Some of those Bhabha criticises, such as liberals and communitarians, have largely ignored his attacks. Others, particularly those holding radical positions, have responded. One sustained political challenge to Bhabha's approach has been mounted by Marxists and other materialists (though see above, 105-6 on contested meanings of the word 'materialism'). This is the main challenge in the existing literature to Bhabha's position. Critics from a Marxist or materialist background dislike the primacy of language in poststructuralist theory. Hence, in a materialist critique of postcolonial theory, Benita Parry accuses Bhabha of 'textual idealism' (2004:3). In Bhabha's texts, the material, capitalist basis of colonialism recedes from view. Bhabha's refusal to engage with Marxism reinforces this tendency to conceal capitalism (2004:3). For Parry, this is a particular instance of a wider problem of obscurance in Bhabha's work. According to Parry, postcolonial studies is 'ensnared in an increasingly repetitive preoccupation with sign systems and the exegetics of representation' (2004:12).

This leads to a systematic misunderstanding of power-dynamics. In particular, Bhabha treats colonialism as transactional, rather than conflictual (2004:8). His work is focused on the inbetween space of negotiation – of meanings produced *together*, in a dialogue between coloniser and colonised. For Parry, this rewrites 'invasion, expropriation and exploitation as a symbiotic encounter' (2004:8). It treats invasion and domination as indeterminate and

deferred (2004:56). In other words, Bhabha treats colonisation as if it was a textual dialogue between two actors. He downplays the violence involved. The image of colonialism as negotiation largely replaces the image of colonialism as a struggle of antagonistic forces (2004:26). Indeed, according to Parry, Bhabha refuses the notion of conflict as such (2004:56). He tends to portray the colonised as complicit in, rather than opposed to, colonialism (2004:67), and colonialism as a dialogue rather than a monologue.

This critique has political implications, because the concealment of violence as the basis of colonialism impedes anti-colonial antagonism. Bhabha's preference for occupying and subverting dominant positions (see above, 212-19) leads to a rejection of confrontational anti-colonial politics (2004:7). Bhabha rejects fixed subject-positions and binaries. This leaves no space for anti-colonialism as usually practiced (2004:8). Because of ideas of epistemic violence (i.e. the idea that the colonised are silenced) and the neglect of anti-colonial discourse, Bhabha and others like him eliminate the role of the colonised as subject, combatant and bearer of knowledge (2004:19). The colonised are portrayed in postcolonial studies either as silent or as negotiating with the colonised (2004:14). Spivak's 'Can the Subaltern Speak' (1988) is a clear case in point, though the critique also seems to apply to Bhabha.

Parry focuses on postcolonial studies in general, rather than Bhabha in particular – though he's one of the postcolonial authors she refers to. According to Parry, anti-colonial political resistance is not privileged, or even recognised, in postcolonial studies (2004:19). Instead, colonised people are seen as resisting indirectly by misappropriating dominant discourses (2004:23). Resisters place disruptive elements in dominant texts, instead of formulating different knowledges outside dominant texts. This process is meant to break up the colonial text, and therefore colonial authority. The postcolonial analysis depends on an assumption that authority is mainly textual, not physical or economic. This model misrepresents the struggles of current and past anti-colonialists. It obscures the existence of counter-discourses (2004:25-26). The focus on textual performance obscures the idea of resistance as undermining and defeating an oppressive opponent (2004:66). Parry thus suggests that Bhabha's ontology leads to political collaboration with colonialism.

Bhabha sees various strategies of textual subversion as vital forms of resistance (see above, Chapters 3, 5 and 7). According to Parry, this means that Bhabha glorifies strategies which arise from weakness. The colonised make the best of a bad situation through tactics such as mimicry. However, in her view, they abandon the dominant text once a 'never-colonized and utopian' counter-discourse is available (2004:27). These counter-discourses are not reducible to nostalgia or fundamentalism. They often involve creative responses to colonialism (2004:38). Parry lists empirical examples, such as Wilson Parry's study of Jamaican limbo-dancing, Terdiman's 'de/recitation', Haitian voodoo *(voudoun)*, and Michel Pecheux's idea of a 'discourse-against', which takes up a stance of separation from the supposedly universal claims of the dominant discourse (2004:38-40). Theorists like Bhabha and Spivak can't deal with this emergent counter-discourse. It violates the root assumptions of their theories. They are therefore unable to formulate or engage with anti-colonial politics.

In place of an anti-colonial politics, Parry argues that Bhabha idealises various negative effects of colonialism. The cultural assimilation Bhabha celebrates is actually typical of colonial elites (2004:90). It reflects a search for a middle ground between resistance and submission (2004:90). Bhabha also tends to idealise people who are displaced and 'unhomely', and their escape from nation and place (2004:10). (This is not necessarily true, although the difference between idealising these experiences and valuing their negative emotional effects is a subtle one; see above, 331-55). Despite his rejection of binaries, Bhabha reduces the available alternatives to only two: either retrograde essentialist fundamentalism, or his own style of transnational cosmopolitanism (2004:69). In fact there are a lot more than two options.

As well as displacing historical events and actors, Bhabha also displaces authors, such as the anti-colonial radical Frantz Fanon, from their contexts (2004:16; c.f. above, 861-882). Parry is particularly critical of Bhabha's rejection of Fanon's revolutionary politics. She suggests that Bhabha reduces Fanon's approach to a tragic search for impossible deliverance (2004:16). She also notes that Fanon sees colonialism mainly as coercion, not negotiation or hegemony (2004:43). Finally, she suggests that Bhabha is 'embarrassed' by anti-colonial forebears, such as Fanon, who break contemporary rules of radicalism (2004:63).

While Parry is critical of Bhabha's decontextualisation of opponents, she is also prone to look for hidden motives in Bhabha's work. This leads to claims which are sometimes as tenuous as Bhabha's. Like many Marxist critics, Parry seeks to reduce her opponents to class categories. In Bhabha's case, she argues that he speaks as an elite migrant, rather than an oppressed person. Parry believes that cosmopolitanism is exclusive to elites. She argues that Bhabha implicitly privileges elite experiences of displacement and migration over popular experiences (2004:70). The ability to commute between widely separated locations is the basis for a position where nation-states no longer matter. For the poor and marginal,

on the contrary, national issues are still central (2004:71). This is partly why Parry remains attached to 'class analysis and vanguardism' (2004:86) in a presumably rather orthodox sense.

I think this critique is rather simplistic. Popular transnationalisms *do* exist, ranging from socialism and anarchism to diasporic Tamil nationalism and political Islam. In addition, migration is itself an autonomous political practice of oppressed people (Mezzadra, 2007; Papastergiadis, 2000). And Bhabha by no means rejects national-scale politics. Parry, like Bhabha, continues to see the nation-state as the main site of opposition. She thus idealises the state itself (which can be just as abusive as global capitalism), and misunderstands the current world, in which states have been partly captured by transnational elites. Social movements today require cosmopolitan autonomy beyond the nation-state model.

In its response to Bhabha and postcolonialism, Parry's argument repeats standard Marxist and radical criticisms of poststructuralism. These critiques argue that the emphasis on difference undermines the recognition of dominant social structures. The choice to talk about 'discourse' rather than material structures is often the hook for this critique.

Poststructuralists are taken to believe that people can endlessly redefine their identities just by changing their language and social performance. In fact, critics claim, such choices are constrained by the dominant system. Since capitalism (or whatever the dominant system is called by the theorist in question) is itself a totalising system, only a sufficiently general theory can engage with its functioning and provide a basis for resistance (c.f. Jameson, 1991; Zerzan, n.d.c; Graeber, 2004; O'Neill, 1994; Code, 1995; Hill et al., 1999). This is a much larger topic than can be handled in relation to Bhabha alone. In my view, critics are sometimes prone to minimise the breadth of the concept of 'discourse'. But, they have a point about the impact of the poststructuralist language model (see above, 81-5, 101-2, 108-10).

Parry's critique is also echoed by other leftist critics. Jonathan Dollimore (1986), for example, argues that inversion is a necessary stage in overcoming hierarchy. The attempt to destroy hierarchy without inverting it in fact leaves it intact. Abdul JanMohammed (1983) argues that ambiguities in dominant and subaltern texts are not equivalent. The former seek to resolve contradictions to stabilise power, the latter to visibilise problems. Polarising, Manichean binaries in anti-colonial movements are expressions of real antagonisms which Bhabha downplays. They are 'not a fanciful metaphoric caricature but an accurate representation of a profound conflict' (JanMohamed, 1983:60). Arif Dirlik (1994a) and Masao Miyoshi (1993) accuse Bhabha of ignoring current world politics and political economy. Dirlik also accuses Bhabha of reducing political conflicts to psychological or textual conflicts (1994a:333). Manthia Diawara argues against the valuing of hybridity as the privileged way of being 'Black' or subaltern. This framing necessarily sacrifices some Black people who are not sufficiently hybrid (1990-1). While these criticisms come from different directions (some Marxist, some anti-colonial), they follow a similar trajectory. They all suggest that anti-colonial struggles would be undermined if they echoed Bhabha's focus on textuality and displacement.

Along similar lines, Fernando Coronil argues that the repudiation of metanarratives paradoxically creates a different kind of fixity and essentialism. It presents everything as free-floating, and it essentialises identity as difference (cited Dirlik, 1998a:346). Phillips (1998) also argues that Bhabha's emphasis on inbetweenness reflects the circulation of capital. Capital is itself always inbetween. The shift towards circulation, instead of production, is indeed definitive of contemporary capitalism (Clover, 2016). Shumar suggests that Bhabha neglects the material reasons colonisers kept the colonial discourse operating (2010:503). Easthope rather strangely reads Bhabha as ultra-left, and opposed to national-level politics (2010:346). He sees Bhabha as offering an impossible utopia in which identity vanishes in 'wall-to-wall hybridity' (2010:151). Kapoor (2003) similarly sees Bhabha as neglecting national and transnational scales. He suggests that localised resistance without 'coordinating mechanisms' does not translate into a hegemonic challenge. Some of these criticisms involve elements of straw-manning or simplification. Bhabha does not reject national-scale politics, call for local-only politics, or call for a dispersed politics of diversity. He rejects the idea of endless deferral or infinite textual productivity (LC, 182-3). But the criticisms also contain some truth. Bhabha neglects institutional and movement politics. He does not theorise capitalism, either in colonial history or in neoliberalism/globalisation. And he reductively repeats his insistence on endless ambivalence, to the detriment of politics.

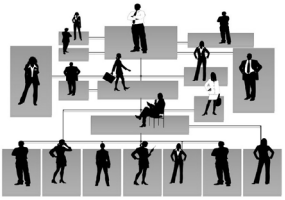
Arif Dirlik advances a similar critique. He suggests that 'postcolonialism' has become a widespread concept, not because of its analytical rigour or political effects, but because of the status and visibility of a few academics from 'Third World' countries (1998a:329). The term reflects the academic respectability of these scholars. It is vague and multiply determined. It has largely become discursive rather than geographical, because many of its proponents are no longer based in the 'Third World' (1998a:332). It tends to lack geographical and temporal limits. The themes of postcolonialism are not new. They are basically the same themes that 'Third World' intellectuals have always investigated: colonialism, western power, economic dependency, the collision of European and local

cultures, subaltern resistance and so on. However, postcolonial scholars tend to evacuate these discussions of the emphasis on global capitalism which was prominent in earlier 'Third World' writings (1998a:331). Postcolonial theory also tends to exclude from its remit most of the people who actually live in former colonies. For example, it does not relate to the popularity of modernisation and nationalism in 'Third World' countries (1998a:337). It reflects the concerns of a small group of Indian intellectuals, but these concerns are conflated with general global problems as well as with specific problems in Indian history-writing (1998a:340). Postcolonial theory seeks to constitute a vision of the world in the image of these intellectuals (1998a:339).

In my view, this critique is persuasive. I would add that this is a broader problem. Identity-based theorists often covertly speak for (typically "as") various oppressed groups, but are unrepresentative of these groups. A small group of highly educated, highly visible people create an image of a politics of each marginalised group which is unrepresentative of the group. The fact that large numbers of people in any given category are either conservative, liberal/modernist, socialist, or apathetic about politics is concealed by the hyper-visibility of a small number of spokespeople. These spokespeople give the misleading impression that they express the standpoint of oppressed people in general. White middle-class academics and activists, who lack contact with other people from the same oppressed group, usually fall for it. In fact these elite theorists are repeating European poststructuralist ideas and constructing a problem-field which exaggerates their own importance. Their particular concerns have not helped to forge a radical politics of the excluded. Often, instead, they have exported academia's parochial concerns and Third Way managerial practices into radical spaces (see below, 980-95).

Dirlik also argues that postcolonial theory is in fact a general theory, a 'metanarrative' – the kind of big general theory which poststructuralism and postcolonialism are meant to leave behind. It begins its project with a critique of Marxist universalism. However, it does not follow up this repudiation of universalism with 'dispersion into local vernaculars'. Instead it promotes poststructuralism as an alternative, but disavowed, universal (1998a:342; c.f. my analysis above, 251-8, 264-8). Dirlik argues that the main contribution of postcolonial theory is to rephrase longstanding 'Third World' problems in poststructuralist terms (1998a:352). He accuses Bhabha in particular of 'political mystification and theoretical obfuscation', of reducing social and political problems to psychological problems, and of replacing historical and social explanation with linguistic manipulation (1998a:333). He is also concerned that Bhabha's hybridity always flows between postcolonial and 'First World' positions, never between marginal locations (1998a:342). Also, the emphasis on hybridity neglects power-differences between positions. Hybrid postcolonial intellectuals are often privileged over intellectuals in the South, and over non-elite people (e.g. white or black working-class people) in the North (1998a:343).

Like many Marxists, Dirlik seeks to capture his adversaries within his definition of capitalism. He treats the 'postcolonial aura' as part of a shift in capitalism which valorises 'Third World' intellectuals. According to Dirlik, the writings of authors such as Bhabha are functional for global capitalism. Postcolonial theory is 'designed to *avoid* making sense of the crisis'. It resists meaning, and Marxist theory in particular. In doing this, it covers up the position of postcolonial intellectuals. It covers up their origins in global capitalism and their positions as beneficiaries rather than victims (1998a:353). Anthony Appiah terms these scholars a 'comprador intelligentsia' (cited Dirlik, 1998a:356). This is a spin on the dependency-theory concept of the comprador bourgeoisie – a local elite which aids neocolonial power by acting as local allies of foreign or transnational capital in return for a small share of the profits.



Similarly, a recent article on 'identity politics' on a Marxist website suggests a relationship between the style of politics exemplified by Bhabha and the rise of a small elite within racial minority populations. In the US, around 65% of black and Latino people own close to zero percent of the wealth of the entire group. The richest 10% of each group own about 75% of its wealth. The wealth of the richest within these groups has massively increased under Barack Obama, while average members' wealth has declined (Anon., 2017). According to Marxists, the tiny elite within minority groups is the main constituency for theories such as postcolonial theory. "Identity politics" is mainly a way for the small elite in each group to strengthen its position in capitalism by hegemonising entire social groups in support of an agenda benefiting mainly the elite. The minority elite's main project is upward mobility in the general elite – in which they are still a junior and small fraction.

The interests of this elite group are antagonistic with those of workers, peasants and poor people from the same ethnic groups. This can lead to forms of politics supportive of dominant power structures (Daher, 2018a, 2018b; Olayode, 2018). For Marxist critics, this stratum of intellectuals tends to ignore conflictual antagonisms. It has an interest in the redistribution of power within the elite, but not in radical social change which destroys the elite's position. According to Dirlik, authors like Bhabha seek to abolish binaries such as the core-periphery split, believing that abolishing the concepts will destroy the realities (1998a:329). This is preferred to 'essentialist' Marxist approaches. But Dirlik argues that world systems approaches (an earlier type of Marxist-inspired anti-colonial theory) are already relational rather than essentialist. Authors such as Bhabha wrongly classify their opponents as essentialist, using the name as a straw-man (1998a:346).

Dirlik's critique is an example of a wider tendency. Marxist scholars typically argue that theories such as Bhabha's are actually *part* of the rise of neoliberal capitalism. 'Postmodernism' – the term they use for theories such as those of Bhabha, Spivak, Derrida, Lacan, Foucault, and Deleuze – is taken to be a product of neoliberalism. It helps neoliberal capitalism to dismantle existing identities. It creates a new type of fluid, ironic subject – the culture industry manager or cultural studies professor. This "subject" was important for the 2000s strategy of building up the creative industries as a new frontier for capital accumulation (see Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005; McRobbie, 2012; Raunig et al., 2012). While reductive, this critique is not entirely ungrounded. In fact, there are even articles in management studies which reference Bhabha's usefulness for multinational corporations (Frenkel, 2008; Özkazanç-Pan, 2008). To be fair, the same is true of most radical scholars, including Situationists and Marxists as well as poststructuralists. However, it suggests that Bhabha's theory might not be as alien to capitalism as it seems.

Marxist critiques also focus on Bhabha's theory of cultural negotiation. In Bhabha's argument, as Marxists understand it, people *put themselves* in standpoints or identities, through writing or narrating. Even in an oppressive structure such as colonialism, identity-formation is negotiated and transactional. People can renegotiate what their standpoint means, using the ambiguity and ambivalence inherent in language. In a Marxist account, people are *put* in class positions by an outer structure or by dominant groups. For instance, workers are forced into a position of selling their labour power by being dispossessed of other resources. For neo-Marxists, people articulate their identities *from* positions and experiences which are generated from the outside. If Bhabha is right, then interpretive ability or competence can break down oppression. This reproduces (in a rather sideways way) the Third Way myth that education is a panacea for economic and social inequalities. If he's wrong, and the problem of power-inequality is rooted in outer structures of socio-economic power, then reinterpretations are only effective if they are connected to redistributions of power. Bhabha is only interpreting the world differently; the point, however, is to change it.

While I have much sympathy with these critiques, in terms of Bhabha's neglect of economics and politics, I feel that Marxist critics sometimes bend the stick too far the other way. Just as language does not always successfully interpellate, so capitalism does not always successfully extract surplus value. Capitalism's insertion in marginal (Southern or 'Third World') locations is often tenuous and partial. Southern capitalism coexists with older, non-capitalist forms of life (such as subsistence economies), with large "relative surplus populations" excluded from value-production, and with local formations born of particular contexts. In Nigeria for instance, the main capitalist activity is oil extraction. The oil industry enriches foreign companies and the kleptocratic Nigerian state, but it only employs a small number of workers, and many of these are foreigners. Most Nigerians survive (more-or-less tenuously) through subsistence farming, or informal trading on the margins of capitalism (Zalik, 2004:404; Beckman, 2004; Idemudia, 2011:177). Nigerian

social struggles are often less class struggles than subsistence struggles, against commodification of resources needed by the poor (Idemudia, 2011:178; Turner and Brownhill, 2004). However, they take the disguised form of identity-struggles among ethnic groups, because of competition to capture the patronage flows distributed by the Nigerian state (Zalik, 2004). This in turn makes conflicts rather zero-sum, and serves as a pretext for authoritarianism and the closure of political space (Beckman, 2004; Kasfir, 1976). None of this fits very well into Bhabha's model of colonialism as textual negotiation, but nor does it fit well into an orthodox Marxist account. Marxists have effectively theorised the Nigerian state and the oil economy in terms of dependency, primitive accumulation, and a colonial state-form (Beckman, 2004; Watts, 2007), but the position of subsistence and informal sectors and the socially excluded is usually neglected in such accounts (but c.f. Turner and Brownhill, 2004; Ikelegbe, 2006).

Also, the Marxist idea that the contours of theory can be read-off directly from economic structures and interests is as problematic as the postcolonial idea that they can be read-off from positionalities. Bhabha is not simply an elite migrant seeking to defuse anti-colonial struggles out of bourgeois class interest. He's not taking the same position as Jagdish Bhagwati or Deepak Lal – Indian economists who promote neoliberalism – or the Hindu communalist politicians who periodically rule India and try to develop the country into a neoliberal power. In many respects, his project is antagonistic with theirs. There is thus a gap between Bhabha (and postcolonial theory more broadly), and the worldview of the 'comprador' elite within India (which is itself divided into different class fractions). Bhabha's position arises from an intersection between trends in European poststructuralism, identity-based social movements, Indian radical theory, and a specific global context. It does not reflect a party line of the Indian bourgeoisie.

Poststructuralism and postcolonial theory are not simply expressions of postmodern capitalism. They are continuations – however recuperated, in some cases – of the revolutions of the 1960s/70s. However, they often deradicalise their own tradition, much as orthodox Marxism and social-democracy deradicalised earlier left-wing politics. Many Marxists downplay the distinct radicalism of 1960s/70s social movements because of

their fidelity to earlier revolutionary models (such as those of 1848, 1871, and 1917). Yet these models were also partially recuperated and displaced by capitalism. I believe that a third alternative – a rhizomatic, horizontalist politics of autonomy – is preferable to both linguistic reductionism and material reductionism. This is a type of politics which also speaks to the situation of the radically excluded, so-called "surplus population", and to the survival of subsistence economies and the need to expand subsistence as an alternative to capitalism.

Relying on their own 'trunk' or ideological focus, Marxist critiques of Bhabha are often too simplistic. The Marxist stereotype of a 'postmodernist' – someone who maintains that anyone can occupy any subject-position or identity by a simple act of will or play, and thereby restructure the world – does not reflect Bhabha's position. In fact, it does not reflect the positions of any of the well-known poststructuralists or postcolonial theorists. It's as much a straw-man as the image of Marxists as crude economic reductionists. In practice, Bhabha tends to promote the position of elite intermediaries who mimic colonial culture. But he does not do this with any clear intent to promote elitism. It seems unfair to suggest that Bhabha is directly working for capital, even unintentionally. His project of breaking down all meanings and attachments is not especially useful for resistance. But it is also damaging to ideas supportive of global capitalism, such as the rational subject and the nation-state. Postcolonial writers like Ashis Nandy, Mahmood Mamdani, Joseph Massad, and Salman Rushdie have come under attack from governments because of the threat they pose to local comprador elites or global power regimes. This said, Bhabha's theory tends not to question neoliberalism. It encourages a reformist strategy, and devalues the affects and discourses which underpin radical movements. This might explain why approaches like postcolonial theory have been given more leeway in neoliberal universities than Marxist and other anti-capitalist perspectives.

The question of which forms of power are 'material' and 'discursive', and indeed whether the two are mutually exclusive, is a thorny one. Many (though not all) Marxists take the economic level – the pursuit of profit, wealth and control of the means of production – as primary in social life (at least in capitalism). Hence, colonialism is explained, like other historical events, as ultimately derived from the logic of profit. Colonies serve as sources of raw materials, captive markets, slave labour pools, surplus capital sinks, future capitalist economies to be 'developed', and so on. However, a close examination of Marx's theory of capitalism suggests that many of its key terms are also 'discursive'. For example, commodities do not 'really' have exchange-value, in a realist sense; investments cannot 'really' produce profit, in a realist sense. Value, price, profit, money, wages, and so on are social constructs. They are only 'real' because people act as if they are real. The 'material' nature of these forces arises because they operate independently of each single individual's will. But this is equally true of the structures theorised by Bhabha, or by Foucault! The basic categories of Marxist theory are social constructs. Still, Marxism differs from poststructuralism in the importance it attaches to one particular set of social constructs, rather than another. Marxism gives a certain primacy to capitalism, whereas poststructuralism gives primacy to the language model.

Poststructuralists would argue that the valuation of wealth or power as an ultimate goal which justifies colonisation is itself a discursive construct. Not all societies value wealth or power. However, this does not defeat the materialist objection. Even if the 'material' level is itself discursive, it is nevertheless distinct from the superficial reasons given for colonisation (for example, the 'civilising mission' and the idea of racial superiority). One discourse might have been used to conceal another. We see this in the case of the East India Company (see above, 522-39): the bureaucratic knowledge-systems of the London officials were retrospective attempts to manage the entrepreneurial aggression of "Anglo-Indian" colonisers. Another disagreement is that Marxists generally think that capitalism is a progressive stage on the road to socialism. The idea of inevitable historical progression through necessary stages is also part of the Marxist claim to be "materialist" rather than "idealist". Capitalism may be a set of social constructs, but its ultimate source is historical necessity, not discursive agency. Poststructuralists and postcolonial theorists deny any such progression of history through stages. History endlessly repeats itself, and/or is radically open. They also differ in their relationship to the modern world and the Enlightenment. 'Modernity' is progressive according to Marxists, whereas for postcolonial theorists, it is a violent form of thought which leads to the evils of colonialism. The critique of 'modern reason' or the 'modern subject' is taken to be deeper than the critique of capitalism. It rejects the subordination of life to production more completely.

Postcolonial theory is also sometimes seen as unrealistic in believing that we are now *post*-colonial. Neocolonial violence is still going on. For example, extractive industries continue to dispossess indigenous people and peasants of land. The US continues to invade and destabilise recalcitrant nation-states and stateless 'black holes'. Police continue to terrorise black people on the streets of America and Britain. How do we stop this ongoing colonial violence? Is Bhabha arguing that it is a constitutive part of existence which we cannot erase? Or is he arguing that hybridity, mimicry and transgression are effective (if indirect) ways to stop it? I believe he is making the second argument, as is suggested by his discussion of human rights (see below, 931-40). Bhabha denies any contradiction between the postcolonial approach and a recognition of neocolonial inequalities. Indeed, he argues that a focus on the emergence of modernity actually enriches understandings of neocolonialism (SPD, 373). The criticism in some ways misses the point. Bhabha is clear that the 'post' in postcolonial does not mean that colonialism has ended. The term 'postcolonial' does not imply that the world is actually beyond colonialism. It implies that colonial categories have been partially deconstructed. Nevertheless, his approach entails neglecting economic, geopolitical and contextual aspects of neocolonialism so as to focus on the eternal recurrence of the incompleteness of the sign. Also, the transgression of colonial categories does not appear to destroy them. Bhabha seems unable to conceptualise an outside to the colonial system.

CHAPTER 15

Bhabha's Politics in Practice

Communities of Oppression and the Right to Narrate

Community-building in Bhabha

As we have seen, Bhabha rejects individualism. He believes that people are co-constituted. The liberal project of unifying people as atomised individuals or moral persons is fundamentally flawed. However, he also rejects communitarian ideas of a unitary community or tradition (see above, 784-9). As we have also seen, Bhabha advocates a type of community-building which does not rely on an overarching 'subject'. There is to be no 'commitment' to a particular 'object' such as the Third World or women (LC, 21). In other words, a community is not constructed through people from diverse backgrounds identifying with a single overarching category. Indeed, these categories to which people are attached are in a sense 'not there' (LC, 26). They are simply rhetorical constructs. Political conflicts and disagreements are not effects of contingent mistakes or wrong ideas. They are effects of the ambiguity of language itself (LC, 26-7). Truths are 'only partial, limited and unstable', and need to permit 'shades of meaning' (LC, 191). Society is a 'society of positions' (LC, 252). The main problem with Marxism is that it 'centres itself' on 'class difference'. For Bhabha, class is simply one of a series of forms of 'social differentiation and social discrimination', such as race and gender. Also, Marxism focuses on 'deterministic causalities'. Bhabha is more interested in contingency and meaning (MGM, 166). This shift does not simply supplement or replace 'class' with other axes of oppression. It removes the idea of socioeconomic structures as the source of social problems, and replaces it with a type of agency at the level of language.

This leads to a preference for process, or 'passage', over being (LC, 253). Politically productive names or identities are contingent, indeterminate, 'nominative or normative'. They are never definite nouns (LC, 234). Minority communities are formed through incommensurable positionalities, not simply multiple positionalities (LC, 231). They operate at the site of enunciation (see below, 936-7). Politics must always question the place from which it begins, or else become authoritarian (LC, 65). This position rules out ideas such as appealing to "the people" or to common humanity, to a unified national identity, to the "99%" or to the "working-class". It therefore rules out most of the approaches which have been taken historically at the levels of institutional and movement politics (whether left-wing or right-wing). Class politics and socialism are particularly singled out as totalising and assimilationist (LC, 175). They are supposedly unable to handle racial, cultural, and gender differences. Bhabha is also sceptical of group-based cultural rights. These rights are insufficient to provide 'protection for new and affiliative forms' of cultural belonging, such as those of migrants. Also, oppressed groups are particularly aware that segregation and hierarchy are untenable in modernity (BSDP, 151).

On the other hand, Bhabha does not want a 'pluralist anarchy' of alternative viewpoints and histories. He wants a 'radical revision in the concept of human community itself' – in the singular (LC, 6). He opposes the 'current fashions for claiming the heterogeneity of every-increasing "causes" and 'multiplicities of subject positions', 'cultural pluralism' and 'cultural relativism'. Instead, he wants to 'halt the endless signification of difference' (LC, 245). He does not want to sap willpower through his deconstruction of identities, but to inspire a renegotiation of politics (LC, 26-7). How, then, does Bhabha see a collective politics based on his philosophy working? Bhabha seeks a style of politics without an overarching 'subject' – in other words, without a single category which unifies all the political allies or movement participants. Bhabha's type of political community articulates different subject-positions without attaching them to an overarching identity (LC, 27). Strategies of emancipation often have to emerge from widely scattered, contingent positions (FBI, 47). Bhabha sees himself as part of a left seeking to embrace politics of

difference, and avoid essentialism and cultural nationalism (FBI, 55). The process is necessarily indeterminate, endless, and even unsuccessful. It is necessary always to keep open the tension of unresolved differences (IoP, 29). The social world is to be seen as 'beyond control', but not 'beyond accommodation'. It can be accommodated by taking responsibility for 'unrepresented pasts' (LC, 12).

Community also has a lot of significance. For Bhabha, it is a site elided in modernity. The opposition between capital and community is more significant than class opposition. Capitalism destroys community by splitting public from private. Community is a minority discourse (LC, 230-1). Bhabha reads Du Bois as already trying to build a rainbow alliance in the 1920s. 'The alliance constitutes a community of minorities, racialized populations, workers, women, and the unwaged... the subjects of what we have come to call... a culture of rights' (BSDP, 149). These minorities are themselves 'contingent' and constructed, and 'solidarity depends on surpassing autonomy or sovereignty in favor of an inter-cultural articulation of differences' (BSDP, 150). However, this is not simply recognition of others' right to live their own way. It requires the smothering over-presence of co-constitution. Recognition has to be 'more than a person-to-person dialogical exchange', or even 'group-to-group'. It needs to operate at the level of practices through which people open themselves to, or avoid, the presence of others (ONO, 12).

According to Bhabha, excluded minorities seek integration, but not assimilation. They seek integration through new forms of authority and autonomy. They need reassuring that participation will lead to a more equal distribution of power. This leads to a need to build a new 'interpretive community' able to 'bear witness' to minority writings and become tolerant of difference and dissent. Postcolonial criticism provides this new community (CF, 63). However, it does not simply acknowledge the other. It also brings “us” (the ingroup) into question (CF, 64), because of co-constitution. It savagely roots out the settler inside every European (CF, 64). This is the role of the new community. Bearing-witness breaks down egos and creates new types of subject.

Like Laclau and Mouffe, Bhabha insists that a community needs to be constructed. It does not express prior social connections. Community is always built as a process. It is not something which pre-exists and then finds expression in social movements. When Bhabha formulated this vision in the 1980s, he probably had in mind some variant of the 'rainbow alliance' politics then fashionable among the New Left and the Eurocommunists. This is a strategy for taking state power based on the combination and articulation of different radical and liberal causes. However, Bhabha's model is also reminiscent of the affinity/network model used by anarchists and autonomous social movements (see Karatzogianni and Robinson, 2010; Day, 2005; Katsiaficas, 1997). The affinity approach, like Bhabha's, connects different groups and perspectives without a single unifying identity. It creates connections based on desires, intimate friendships, or particular political projects, among groups which work together as a network (like Deleuze and Guattari's rhizomes), without an overarching unity.

However, there are vital differences between Bhabha's model and the affinity model. Bhabha places a much greater emphasis on fixed identities and the discursive relations between them. People are to relate as members of marginalised groups which have been rendered 'other' to the dominant 'subject' in various ways. Bhabha thus seeks a type of minority-to-minority communication, among marginalised groups. Politics takes the form of alliance-building through narration, in a context where solid identities do not really exist. And crucially, the field of representation and culture – not party politics or direct action – is the main focus. Language and discourse play central roles in this model. For Bhabha, minority politics is about 'talking', about formulating different 'angles of vision' (MM, 448). Political constituencies and identities are necessarily constructed and negotiated. They come from contingent acts of 'writing' or social construction. This contingency is not itself a basis for unity. Being a constructivist does not put someone on the right side, because all identities are constructed (SPD, 385).

For Bhabha, politics should not come from things people have in common, or from each group pursuing its own interests or desires. Bhabha particularly rejects the idea of 'expressive togetherness' - the possibility of founding politics on experiences or similarities which already exist (SPD, 386). It is not clear why common *negative* experiences are nonetheless permissible. The transcendent authority of the "nation" or "people" needs to be constantly disrupted to ensure that no ideology can claim transcendent authority (LC, 148). This is important to create space for types of cultural discourse which the dominant culture cannot recognise. Counter-narratives which 'continually evoke and erase' the 'totalising boundaries' of categories such as the nation are needed to disturb the construction of 'essentialist identities' (LC, 149). This constant disruption of categories is meant to guarantee against authoritarian closure. The constant sliding of signifiers due to their ambivalence and co-constitution is meant to stop them from being used to homogenise people. The point of marginal voices as 'supplements' is to 'add to', not to 'add up' (LC, 155). Groups don't get added into a Laclauian series of equivalents. The idea is to disrupt meanings and order, not to complete them. The resultant signifiers of perplexity can still write history of a sort. They can still become loci of political solidarity. But they cannot create images of social totality or homogeneous experience. They continually reintroduce otherness and thereby reveal an ambivalence which is ontologically basic (LC, 157).

Bhabha rejects the idea of progress because he thinks it is part of the nation-centric heritage (ODD, 2). Minority positions involve a translational state in which 'no resolution' is possible because 'the two conditions are ambivalently enjoined' in the process of survival (LC, 224). Survival and negotiation involve a type of 'action and agency more complex' than despair or progress (LC, 255). Indeed, Bhabha treats survival as an alternative to progressive change and utopianism. This 'survival' is a kind of presentist dream, distinct from both utopian progress and nostalgia. It amounts to the act of living on borderlines. Migrants survive only if they learn how to create newness (LC, 226-7). The indeterminacy of articulation poses the future as an open question (LC, 235). In this

sense, it is empowering. Survival becomes a political master-signifier. 'It is "survival" rather than "sovereignty" that should frame the ethical and political values that provide us with a workable concept of the good life lived side by side with others' (DH, n.p.). We need, says Bhabha, to learn to think 'in terms of the border country of aporetic conflations', where national-scale pursuit of security and community coexists with diminishing state sovereignty and 'neoliberal encroachments' of markets and transnational institutions (ODD, 3).

Although containing a utopian glimmer, survival also involves a fundamental lack. Bhabha cites one of Morrison's characters: 'What is to be done in a world where even when you were a solution you were a problem'. For Bhabha, this is the eternal problem of performativity and the deferral of meaning (LC, 255). Ego-bashing is central to Bhabha's

project, and this also entails the renunciation of successful liberation. Citing Richard Sennett, Bhabha suggests that 'we can only properly relate to the global cosmopolitan experience' – which is to say, we can only adapt psychologically to neoliberalism – 'by confronting our deepest anxieties about our own identities and pushing against the ego's narcissistic limits: a real connection to others in the global context "arises from recognizing the insufficiencies of the self... [and] ceasing to dream of the world made whole"' (CA, 45; citing Sennett, 1994:13). The point of radical politics is not, therefore, to satisfy desires or liberate ourselves from alienation. The point is a process of 'articulating and negotiating cultural and social differences without the promise of some privileged and accurate representation of "totality" or a teleological resolution' (CA, 44). Knowledge is replaced by an endless intersubjective conversation. This 'somber image of "conversation" as the community of human survival' also includes 'sustained hope' (CA, 42), a kind of utopian glimmer. Nonetheless, this glimmer is illusory. One never gets beyond survival, to flourishing or liberation. One is instead stuck in an eternal present of endless survival. The impression is unavoidable that Bhabha does not *want* the incommensurability of positions to be taken away. It is vital to his strategy of sublimation.

However, Bhabha contradicts himself on this. In one interview, he suggests that differences are complementary. '[T]he pieces of a broken vessel [e.g. cup or vase] fit together not because they are all the same [but because they fit] in all their differences. It is that which gives the vessel its strength'. This means that the problem of the 'misfit' is a problem of 'translation' (DH, n.p.). In this case, differences can be integrated because they overlap. They occur among co-constituted subjectivities. This is a model of difference with no space for anything which does not ultimately "fit".

Instead of an overarching identity, Bhabha seeks a kind of unity in the negative fact of being oppressed or silenced. Political groups from different directions can refuse to homogenise their oppression, yet still use it as a common cause (LC, 64). Hence, a community on Bhabha's model would be a negatively-focused coalition of opposition to hegemonic discourses, formed among actors defined primarily by their experiences of oppression. People are to come to 'live Other-wise'. This seems to mean living in a constant sense of 'ourselves as other', a permanent condition of disjuncture (LC, 64). Probably it involves a Levinasian ethics, a sense that the self's identity passes through the other, and a resultant "humility". It is certainly not an empowering or enjoyable experience. The desirable otherness of disalienation is a banal, futile, dangerous dream. The best we can hope for are small shifts in binaries accomplished through representation (LC, 62-3). Marginalised groups are to unite, not based on particular identities or orientations, but as a 'community of condition' (BSDP, 152). What unifies them is the experience of oppression. People are not to be 'humanised'. Instead, the starting-place for politics should be the 'unthought', and a 'repetitious desire to recognize ourselves doubly', through inbetweenness and the other (LC, 65). With ideas of reconciliation, Hegelian transcendence and salvation decisively rejected, all that is left is the goal of survival (LC, 170). This sounds grim and meaningless. However, survival is rendered meaningful and worthwhile through the sublimation of suffering. This is basically a political version of the Lacanian therapeutic goal of creating a subject of the drive.

As we have seen (above, 139-50), Bhabha places a great emphasis on positionality. Progressive political lessons are learnt mainly from the marginalised. Marginalised people's experiences and points of view are assumed to be directly, immediately radical. They are never a form of false consciousness or naïve common sense. Their experiences of disjuncture are themselves disruptive and subversive. This progressive aspect of marginalised experiences provides the core of Bhabha's political vision. The 'scattering' of migrants leads to a 'gathering' (LC, 139), a coming-together around postcolonial politics. We should feel ourselves to be part of a 'community of Others', with a sense of agency and solidarity (WR). This community is primarily defined by positionality. But it is what would today be called 'intersectional', constisting of a range of different, marginalised positionalities. This recomposition – the formation of a new political community – is based on a process of valuing experiences of marginality. 'Experience' here has an ambiguous meaning as something lacking both empiricist reality and authorial mastery, yet also somehow representable. It is tied-up with struggles around cultural 'authorization' or authority to speak (LC, 179). This suggests that people should focus on issues of who gets to speak and of controlling the conversation, rather than on assessing the content of whatever claims are made.

The radical power of minorities stems not from their difference or outsider status, but from their location at the point where the internal contradictions of the social system manifest. Their radicality consists in the fact that transformative force is concentrated at this point. However, their transformative force is itself partial and disruptive, rather than totally transformative. The transformations they bring about come from the deferral and reinflection of dominant texts. They never come from antagonism. Bhabha's position thus leads ultimately to something like liberal integrationism, and also to a celebration of the transformative force of precarity (see above, 730-5). In his treatment of minorities, Bhabha exercises his usual preference for reducing everything to a single whole with no outside. Radical agency occurs through acting on a common, holistic social text from a disjunctive point.

However, there are Derridean limits to Bhabha's integrationism. It is not, for example, like Laclau and Mouffe's idea of hegemony. Bhabha seeks a solidarity of the 'partial collective' rather than 'sovereign mastery' (SBS, 348). This point is not developed. It seems to simply mean the self-limitation of the liberal state. However, if followed through, it suggests that the central point of concentrated power should be abandoned. It hints towards a Clastrean politics of diffuse power. If one subtracts Bhabha's apparent confusion of the ecstatic continuum of the Spectacle and financial capital with the holism of being, his approach might have more radical effects. Bhabha also advances a view of 'citizenship' as agency. 'Citizenship is a form of agency that allows us to coexist with each other in different forms of community, and... to take meaningful action in the public sphere' (MGM, 171). It is the ability to act in common which constitutes social power and belonging. The point is to negotiate the recurring reappearance of images of the past in the present, so as to reactivate, relocate and resignify the past. This leads to an 'ethics of "survival" that allows us to *work through the present*' and 'frees us from the determinism' of a past which seems always to return (CIB, 59; see also above, 374 on the time-lag).

Bhabha posits a difference between the nation as 'vehicle of nationalist ideology' or as 'jurisdiction of ethical responsibility, civic obligation, and cultural practice' (PN3, 70). The nation in the second sense is to be embraced and used for a Levinasian politics. This involves a re-enchantment of citizenship. 'The political rationale of citizenship has been progressively depleted of the entire range of values and powers that we associate with imaginative and ethical action... [T]he domain of psych[ological] and social *affect* have been bleached out of political rationality and the image of the effective citizen-agent' (PN3, 74). This process needs to be reversed with 'ethical imperatives of *affective agency*' which engages with affects such as anxiety, shame, terror, and hope (PN3, 74). The result is an 'emergent, incipient "public"' which has a national location and a metaphysical tone, but not nationalism or universalism (PN3, 74). It is in an extimate co-constituted relationship, at once 'strange' and too close, that one is able both to perceive and show ethical regard for others (PAS, 70). It is as co-constituted beings that people are to coalesce in ambivalent communities.

This view is similar to, and yet different from, identity politics as usually conceived. As we have seen (above, 212-19), Bhabha dislikes antagonistic politics. He prefers practices which create hybridity and undermine binaries. This gives his politics a somewhat depoliticising flavour. Instead of taking sides in conflicts, or seeking to transcend them, Bhabha values the creation of supplementary spaces alongside them (LC, 209). There is no final or even temporary resolution. Even dialogue among marginalised groups never leads to a unified conclusion. It is simply a way of affirming that multiple readings are possible (MM, 455).

This is rather different from rainbow alliance politics and Laclauian articulation. It does not focus so much as these approaches do, on the combination of different forces. Indeed, in Bhabha's model, the different viewpoints are never really articulated at all. For Bhabha, articulation appears to be impossible. Different positions are incommensurable. They 'add to' a situation without 'adding up' (SPD, 385). Their function, therefore, is not to harmonise social relations or unite against a common adversary. It is to perform an endless subversion without ever moving beyond what they subvert. It is, as Bhabha puts it, about 'political practices and ethical choices', not an 'affirmation or authentication of origins or "identities"'. It works towards 'shared' democratic or cosmopolitan values based on incompleteness and trauma, rather than assuming they already exist (SS, 146).

Bhabha's proposed community does not seem to have a substantial political identity of its own. Rather, people connect through their common relation to a dominant system which is at once transgressed and maintained. This is a bit like the 'one no, many yeses' (Kingsnorth, 2004) of anti-capitalism. However, it is founded on lack and trauma, not on the destruction of a fetter and the proliferation of alternatives. It seems to entail the juxtaposition and mutual recognition of many different accounts. But all of them are basically accounts of the same structural position of marginality. Most likely, they are isomorphic (i.e. the same in form and function, even when their origin is different). Among other things, they presumably all express the Derridean/Lacanian subjective structure as theorised by Bhabha, and they will all be in co-constitutive relations with the dominant system or with a privileged group. This structural similarity is the basis for

community. It is because they all transgress dominant categories that different kinds of "otherness" can be integrated, even though they're incommensurable. Politics start from the negative. Citing an article by Margalit which he is 'very fond of', Bhabha observes: 'It is injustice, not justice, which brings us into normative politics: despotism, not freedom. Moral political theory should start with negative politics' (SS, 142). Elsewhere, he cites Margalit's view that ethics should start with the question of 'how to tackle evil' and not 'how to pursue the good' (ONO, 1). This is almost identical to Nietzsche's (1996/1887) definition of slave morality.

The idea of founding community on negativity is an interesting model, in relation to the more common reliance on an integrative 'trunk' or unifying identity. In many ways, it is an inversion or shadow of the usual model. For Laclau and Mouffe, for instance, an integrating idea, word or slogan serves as a master-signifier. It draws together different, otherwise 'floating' or disparate subject-positions, and arranges them either as equivalent or as being in conflict. Bhabha's model is an inverted version of Laclau and Mouffe's theory of articulation. Instead of articulating positively through a common empty signifier, marginalised groups articulate negatively through a common relationship (at once oppositional and co-constituted) with a partially-rejected empty signifier they wish to subvert. Movements are thus constructed through people's wounds, suffering, marginality and so on. This approach is in some ways actualised in today's identity-political movements.

I believe there are substantial weaknesses in Bhabha's model. Firstly, it focuses on the relation to the very thing it negates. It does not create an identity separate from the system, and it does not create an alternative form of social integration. This lack of alternatives and substantial identity has a limiting effect. It is impossible for this style of politics to move beyond opposition, and build a new society. It structurally requires the existing society as the foil against which integration happens. Take away the adversary, and the bonds among allies fall apart. Take for instance the claim: 'Minority discourse acknowledges the status of national culture – and the people – as a contentious, performative space of the perplexity of... living in the midst of the pedagogical representations of the fullness of life' (LC, 157). 'Pedagogy' here means transcendent, homogenising representation. Performance is a kind of supplementarity. In other passages, 'performative' is replaced by 'enunciative' - which in Bhabha's personal language, means roughly the same. It is this "present" moment of performance which opens 'a political space to articulate and negotiate... culturally hybrid social identities', instead of misperceiving them in a 'racist' way as atavistic (LC, 250). Minority solidarity is to be built from this space of perplexity. Yet the space of perplexity is possible only *because* it is in the midst of, yet irreducible to, the 'pedagogical representations'. If minority performance successfully disrupts and interrupts these representations, it also destroys the basis for its own performance. The privileged other has to remain privileged, rigid, 'pedagogical', for the minority space and identity to persist. It not only cannot be violently (or peacefully) overthrown. It also cannot be successfully subverted, disrupted, or interrupted. Bhabha's model has similar effects at an emotional level. Since trauma is the basis for solidarity in this kind of community, it is impossible to pass beyond trauma into empowerment or joy.

This is why Bhabha's discourse analysis stops short of overcoming the dominant order, and why his affective politics focuses on negative affects (see above, 331-46). It ultimately cannot do without the dominant system because it requires the dominant system as the 'trunk' or master-signifier in its own community, even though the function of this 'trunk' is negatively valued. Without the continuation of imperialism, racism, patriarchy,

capitalism and so on, the subjectivities unified against the negative trunk would roll away in different directions, like Marx's metaphorical sack of potatoes. This is not a problem for an anti-capitalist 'one no, many yeses', because the destruction of capitalism is taken to be an unfettering, a new possibility for *multiple* ways of being which don't necessarily *have* to be unified. For Bhabha, however, the loss of co-constitution is also the destruction of the subject. If we are to do without a positive 'trunk', we need a negative one instead. One sees this, for example, when Bhabha discusses a poem he approves of: 'There are images of negative authority – historical, political, economic, and psych[ological] – in conflict with positive, minoritarian or marginalized voices – poetic, spiritual, cultural... [T]he struggle with hegemonic authority enables a viable "agent"... to emerge' (PAS, 67). The marginalised minority discourses can only exist *because* the undesirable 'trunk' is there. Minority agency can emerge only because there is a hostile authority to struggle against. There can be no liberation, because the destruction of the unwanted obstacle is also the destruction of the desiring self.

One can compare here a passage where Bhabha opposes the 'anarchic disruption' of meaning, and instead seeks 'to preserve, at all times, that menacing sense in which the non-sentence is contiguous with the sentence' (LC, 182). The power of meaning is kept intact even while revealing its supplement. Its subversion does not overcome it. A few pages later, agency is defined in terms of inserting oneself in the existing (linguistic) system. It is never expressive, and one does not seek exodus from the system. One continues to enter into the system on its own terms. At the same time, one can insert a 'remainder' of the struggle to insert oneself in language into language itself (LC, 184). This is Bhabha's answer to the Marxist objection that poststructuralism is pessimistic about agency. According to Bhabha, the moment of insertion in language, which is also the in-between moment, is a point at which one can provide or demand contingent groundings, without any certain basis for these. It even gives an agent a kind of 'strategic closure and control' (LC, 186). Hence, agency amounts to reinflecting the process of conformity. One continues the process viewed in psychoanalysis as social subordination,

the renunciation of desire, or "castration". However, one makes sure the pain of the process is always on display. The visibility of one's difficult subordination – and not an end to this subordination – is the "radical" goal. One submits, but one never stops moaning about it. This, perhaps, is a metaphor for Bhabha's politics.

A little later, Bhabha suggests there are three main kinds of human togetherness: hegemonic authority, subaltern communities of suffering, and negotiation/interrogation (LC, 191). These are posited as alternatives to 'liberal' models of disinterested coexistence. Bhabha adds that agency occurs at the intersection of two orders he terms the 'sign' and the 'intersubjective'. The word 'sign' refers to the order of language and meaning. The word 'intersubjective' is associated with inner experiences such as affect and trauma. It seems to be modelled on the Lacanian idea of the Imaginary order, where fantasies rather than signs circulate, and the ego is formed through co-constitution with the other. Symbols (in Bhabha's sense) arise at the intersubjective level. So does 'the role of truth denied subjectivity', or the experience of not being able to speak one's truth. The intersection of the two orders makes social change possible (LC, 191). For Bhabha, the space of the intersubjective is both the space of the excluded, and intensely communal (LC, 198-9). Bhabha here identifies what is experienced as inner life as intersubjective (i.e. between people, presumably on a *che vuoi* basis), but as outside language strictly speaking. He believes that this second level of experience transforms language through its insistent demand to be heard. Through this idea of "the intersubjective", Bhabha restores the claims of the inner life which are otherwise foreclosed by his anti-humanism. However, it does so at the expense of encouraging wide-ranging projection. Inner experience is taken as an effect of an extra-linguistic kind of social life which can be blamed on the co-constituted other.

In another piece, Bhabha seeks to overturn the ideas underpinning liberal states, such as autonomous individuals and human dignity. The individual or the human are to cease to be references. They are to be replaced by 'the speaking subject', conceived in Lacanian or Derridean terms. Cosmopolitan societies are 'paradoxical, side-by-side communities consisting of subjects who are simultaneously the same and other' (SS, 147; ONO, 3). Instead, he believes democracy should be based on 'our psychic and social alienations, moral ambivalences, and personal agonisms as speaking subjects' (SS, 148). It is to be rooted in negativity and survival, not flourishing: '[t]he ethical project of cosmopolitan memory is a negative politics: the perception of public virtue and progress seen through the dark, sometimes distant glass of human survival' (SS, 151). Bhabha admits that this is a 'quasi-universal' view of the 'ethics of Recognition' (ONO, 4). He believes that a particular model of emergence and institutionalisation of rights is valid in any situation. It is not abstractly true and it is not end in itself. Rather, it stems from the endlessly deferred nature of language and identity (ONO, 4-5). The ethic Bhabha advocates is focused at the level of the subject of enunciation, not the content of speech (ONO, 11). Bhabha's politics thus relies on his ontology for its legitimacy. His disavowals aside, this view is universalist: a particular structure of subject-formation is assumed to apply to everyone, everywhere. If "the speaking subject" is a theoretical invention in the same way Bhabha thinks liberal individuals are, or if different "speaking subjects" are structured differently, then Bhabha's approach is just as alienating and oppressive as those which went before it.

The process of supplementation and aspirational reinflection of rights is to be embraced and encouraged. Universals are to be retained, but are 'not ends'. Rather, because language is always deferred, one constantly returns to the pre-normative 'starting questions... to retool our originating assumptions' (SS, 149). The struggle for recognition should take the form of a 'proleptic' aspiration, rather than an authority-claim (ONO, 4). "Prolepsis" (also known as *futur anterieur*) is a word for something which is inferred backwards from a later point. It involves treating present realities in relation to how they will be seen in the future. It subverts dominant norms, at the risk of unfairness to those who are judged by rules

which do not yet apply. Bhabha believes that prolepsis is able to 'retrieve' in the present what has been 'excised, excluded or oppressed – the heterogeneity of harm', as if to protect the futures of the oppressed (ONO, 4). Prolepsis puts rights one step ahead of institutions. However, this aspirational aspect of rights discourse is 'gravely misused' if it is not backed up by 'appropriate means of access and protection' (ONO, 4) – presumably, statist means.

Citing Kristeva, Bhabha specifies that the result of the social change he seeks is 'a polytopic and supple society, neither locked into the nation and its religion nor anarchically exposed to all of its explosions' (SS, 147; ONO, 2). In another work, Bhabha calls for the incorporation of co-constitution into public discourse. 'Such "unconscious determinations" may not always sit easily with reasonable or commonsensical expanations, but [they can still be] representative of character or personhood in a public sense, [and] useful for purposes of democratic dialogue' (DM1, 186). This is Lacanian/Derridean co-constitution, elevated into a model for public reason. Bhabha is very explicit that his position does not involve overthrowing the existing system or changing the form of the state. He seeks a '"polytopic and subtle society" that resists the sovereignty of the nation-form without repudiating its regulatory and administrative authority' (ONO, 3). The state is to remain as legally and coercively powerful as ever. It is to lose its moral authority or legitimation, and somehow persist as a regulative system. Such a tendency to forego legitimacy and rely on pure administration is common in so-called post-political or cybernetic regimes (Wilson and Swyngedouw, 2014).

Bhabha's model is here similar to those proposed by cybernetic theorists who seek to maintain a fluid state at the edge of chaos (see above, 663-4). As we have seen, inbetweenness is crucial to cybernetic control. The affinity model goes the next step, abandoning integrated social values and forced communicability. In bolo'bolo (PM, 1983), the world passes beyond a 'fluid' state into a 'gaseous' state, while retaining virtues of 'solidity'. Each unit – a *bolo* or commune, an individual – can operate autonomously, without requirements of communicability, imposed objectives, or Darwinian selection. Minimal social structures are then simply ways to encourage coexistence and harmony among these radically diverse entities. This is arguably the next revolutionary horizon, opened by the movements of the 1960s-70s and partially recuperated in neoliberalism.

Contrary to how he is seen by some opponents and supporters, Bhabha is not a revolutionary seeking to destroy liberal states from within. He seeks to keep the institutional structure of the present system largely intact. However, he shifts its legitimatory basis. In a sense, Bhabha proposes to keep the institutional power of the modern state, while destroying its symbolic authority or legitimacy. He rejects the anarchist, autonomist, and Deleuzian approaches which break down modern society and/or the state, exposing it to 'anarchic explosions'. But he also rejects the dominant ideologies which previously seemed to justify state power. Instead, he seeks a kind of acceptance of state power as necessary but insufficient, based on the Lacanian, Derridean or Levinasian view of 'the subject', imposed as a comprehensive doctrine. However, the ability of such a state to generate a social basis without departing from its reliance on melancholic affects is questionable.

There are three major problems with forming a community through people's wounds. Firstly, the nature of trauma is such that it is incommunicable. Traumatic memories are trapped in the limbic system and not cognitively processed (see below, 952). A community formed this way is thus likely to lack communication among its members. Since each person's wound feels like something no-one else can understand, and since it cannot be narrated, the community-building effort will fail. Secondly, this model requires that people remain wounded. It requires that the wound remains unhealed. Otherwise, the force integrating progressive politics would vanish. This could be why Bhabha insists that, even when people heal, some remainder of the wound must persist. Thirdly, the status of being wounded is tied-up with the traumatic experience of colonialism (or modernity). The community is, in effect, contingent on colonialism continuing. Colonialism provides a negative force of unity. Its elimination also eliminates the counter-community. It is noticeable that the focus on the negative echoes Nietzsche's (1996/1887) account of slave morality. It suggests a type of politics which is rooted in the other's continued mastery.

This may be why Bhabha can suspend colonial power but not destroy or pass beyond it. For comparison, imagine a Marxist theory which relies on working-class identity and does not wish to pass to a classless society. Such a Marxism would require the continuation of capitalism, because the destruction of capitalism would abolish the working-class as a distinct category. Or think of a variety of anarchism which does not believe in a stateless society. Anarchism is the solidarity of people oppressed by states. Such an anarchism would require the continuation of the state as a basis for its own political community. Neither of these political positions make much sense. The complicity between the radical and their adversary renders them futile. Yet Bhabha posits exactly such a complicity between colonialism and oppressed people. It is because of this complicity and co-constitution that Bhabha's politics tend to reproduce liberalism, colonialism and capitalism while also positing their opposites.

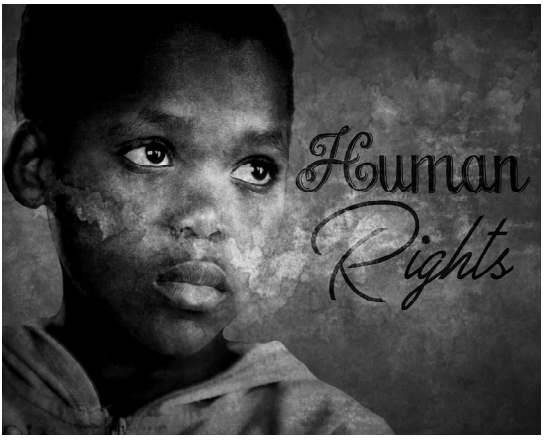
I would also propose a different theory of ideology. I believe there is a root affective layer which has to be articulated for an ideology, identity or sign-system to take root. For example, if someone is excluded or exploited, they will feel anger. This anger might be directed at the powerful, or at false targets such as worse-off groups, or it might be converted or sublimated into other emotions, such as self-hatred, depression, or a fixation on self-control (c.f. Fanon, above, 864-6). Nevertheless, only a position which does something productive with this anger can take root among the excluded. It places a limit on what can be believed, what existential territories can form. Political ideology is largely a process of channelling and articulating affects. This is a process of social construction, but it works with extra-social (even if socially caused) materials.

In the case of feminist consciousness-raising, for instance, the construction of togetherness certainly involved elements of social construction. The use of 'kernel stories' (Kalčik, 1975) and the reinterpretation of everyday life in terms of patriarchy are examples of interpretive acts, of 'writing' in Bhabha's sense. However, this process was only effective because there *were* similarities in women's experiences and feelings, which emerged in the small-group discussion setting. For instance, the surprisingly widespread experience of sexual assault, the basically unsatisfying nature of the housewife role for most women, and the falsity of the widespread belief that pregnancy was always a joyous moment were already present in women's experiences, *before* they were reinterpreted by the group. Articulation relies on prior affect. It wouldn't work if the experiences were too different.

Bhabha's approach emerged in the context of the 'rainbow alliance' politics of the 1980s – not the context of today's internet-linked social movements. It emerged when left and centre-left discourses were seeking to articulate issues, identities and demands stemming from the new social movements of the 1960s-70s. Redistributive politics was still the norm in most of Europe. Two-party systems (social-democrat versus conservative) were also very common. So, 'rainbow alliance' politics usually focused on the centre-left party. Today, we know the end of the story (or at least, the next few chapters). Social-democracy in its centre-left redistributive form largely disappeared. It was overrun by the Third Way and then collapsed electorally. Party systems have fragmented. Neoliberalism has undermined redistributive policies, including those focused on multiculturalism and race. 'Inclusion and diversity' have been redefined in ways which are compatible with neoliberalism. The articulation of new social movement issues with the wider neoliberal context (for and against) culminated roundabout 2000 in the neoliberal-dominated Third Way on the one hand, and the anti-capitalist movement on the other. Identity politics became disarticulated from redistributive and socialist horizons. Today we are witnessing new mutations, including the rise of a new kind of social-media-enabled identity politics, the apparent collapse of the Third Way, and a re-emergence of socialist aspirations. However, in the 1980s, nobody knew how the story ended. It was quite possible to imagine that social-democracy would adapt so as to include marginalised groups, and other emerging issues such as ecology and peace. It was possible to imagine that the knowledge economy would redistribute power and that computer technology would have socially revolutionary effects. Bhabha's hopes now seem to have been in vain.

This said, some of the shifts proposed by Bhabha have actually happened. There are studies of social media which suggest that people are moving towards a type of politics similar to Bhabha's ideal. Most people don't identify with a single party, ideology, or cause, the way people did in the past. Instead, people adopt temporary, partial allegiances which are part of their self-definition and self-branding. These are closely tied to people's personal identities and histories, and their quasi-public, quasi-private articulation on social media (Mahlouly, 2013; Papacharissi, 2010; Wellman et al., 2003). In identity politics in particular, unification through wounds is part of this process.

This process of mediatised politics isn't always seen as progressive. Like Jameson, Bauman (2000) criticises this pattern as a type of consumerism. It involves a relationship between political actors, or between individuals and their movements, which is similar to the relationship between buyers and sellers. It lacks deep meaning or commitment, and is unreliable. It may also neglect tolerance for difference (Loader and Mercea, 2011:7). However, this critique underestimates the affective power of negative attachments to wounded identities, and the ways in which such attachments can channel the emotional effects of neoliberalism. In principle, Bhabha would predict that such a political situation would give rise to disjunctive identities and political liberation. In practice, however, this pattern has not led to greater inclusiveness or even tolerance. People have largely clustered in self- or algorithmically-defined niche communities which function as echo chambers (see Mahlouly, 2013:12; Couldry, 2008:5). The pressures within each of these communities have led to polarisation and mutual hostility. This has, paradoxically, strengthened the kinds of fixed identities Bhabha dislikes. Politics on social media is a microcosm of the wider effects of neoliberalism, which have encouraged intolerance rather than ambivalence.



Human Rights

Bhabha's approach to ethical concepts and the strategic use of liberalism is given substance when he discusses human rights. He recognises that human rights struggles are often progressive, even though he rejects the underlying assumptions. Hence, he advocates a strategic approach. The idea of the 'human' (for instance, human rights) is to be used as a signifier. However, its use is to be 'strategic' and 'translational'. Rights are not to be 'individuated' or 'universal' (DDR, 32). Instead, rights should be derived from ongoing democratic dialogues. Referring to the 'Asian values' debate (about whether cultural norms of communitarianism and authoritarianism in particular Asian countries mean that human rights is an imperialist idea), Bhabha argues that there should be no moment when western rights trump Asian values or vice-versa (WR). There should be an ongoing, endless dialogue.

The implication is that rights are left open-ended, so as to enable recognition of different needs, desires and ways of life. This creates space for dialogue and reconciliation. However, it also takes away much of the critical force of ideas such as rights. Rights becomes a mere signifier of indeterminate value, difficult to deploy decisively. Such a shift

brings the signifier into the field of inbetweenness and ambivalence, at the cost of destroying much of its political usefulness. It is the very ability to appeal to rights over and above community norms and political decisions which gives them their political usefulness. The experience of being subject to injustice cannot be expressed as simply a textual negotiation of meanings. It manifests affectively as something imperative and unconditional – in Lacanian terms, as Real, not Symbolic. Trauma is not simply one signifier or narrative among others. While he recognises such an unsignifiable element in the Lacanian Real, Bhabha's politics relegate this element back to discursive normality.

Other important aspects of Bhabha's view of rights are the primacy of suffering as an ethical motive, and the non-antagonistic tension between ethical imperatives and formal structures. In his essay 'On Writing and Rights', Bhabha approvingly cites a position that political theory should start with the negative – with the issue of how to tackle evil (WR, 1). Human rights discourse is usually associated with law, history and politics. However, the experiences (of trauma, struggle against oppression, etc) to which it speaks are instead located in the arts, affect and imagination (WR, 1). The will to achieve freedom or justice stems from experiences of violation, humiliation, torture and discrimination (WR, 2). In other words, the utopian ideal of inclusion is simply a flip-side of real experiences of oppression. Oppressed people make 'an imaginative appeal to freedom through *counterfactual* choice - the freedom *from* humiliation, suffering, racism'. This is not 'mere rhetoric' but exposes the current inability to choose (BSDP, 140). Refugee rights are also

part of the picture. For Bhabha, '[t]he refugee condition makes the most stringent and severe demands on the national community or the "world community" to recognize the global right of hospitality which is at the heart of human survival itself' (DH, n.p.). Although articulated in terms of rights, this claim is clearly a reference to the open-ended, unrealisable duty of hospitality theorised by Derrida (see above, 306-8). Bhabha is instrumentalising refugees to promote a universal Derridean ethic. And he is doing so in a way which also demands "severity" and ego-decomposition – not multicultural tolerance or a right to asylum.

Rights-claims are 'aspirational' and precede their institutional articulation (SS, 148). In other words, marginalised groups first make claim to rights (such as gay rights, equal pay, abortion rights) which are only later recognised or encoded by laws and institutions. These rights are institutionalised through the 'iterative' process of reinterpreting language based on its endless deferral and ambiguity (SS, 149). Rights-claims do not simply actualise rights which already exist, naturally or legally. Bhabha is also against the view that institutionalisation of minority movements is a kind of recuperation or capture (contrast Deleuze and Guattari, 1987; Croaton, 2012). Rather, institutionalisation is the goal of rights-struggles. This endless reinterpretation of rights may appear progressive if one only considers successful struggles of the marginalised. However, the reinterpretation of rights also creates space for social ingroups or conservatives to articulate new rights (such as men's rights or the rights of foetuses), and for states to posit "rights" which are actually demands for conformity (such as the 'right to security', the 'right to education', or the 'right not to be subject to anti-social behaviour'). Alternatively, judges may *restrict* existing rights through judicial doublethink (for example, interpreting "kettling" as "not a deprivation of liberty", or random searches as "not unreasonable search and seizure"). It is not clear how this can be prevented, if universals are open to continual reinflection. It seems that whoever has the most discursive power will also have the power to decide which rights exist and what they mean – a position unlikely to benefit marginalised people.

According to Bhabha, the contents of particular norms are preceded by a moment of normative formation which is anxious and Levinasian. For example, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights relies on a prior 'modern cosmopolitical subject'. This subject arises in societies where people are both 'the same and other' (SS, 147). Ambiguities in the language of rights, such as the phrase 'as a member of society' in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, provide leverage to create new, second-generation rights (SS, 147). These are part of a project of creating a 'polytopic and supple' society which is neither anarchic nor rigid (SS, 147). Bhabha implies that this society might nonetheless treat prisoners as having 'renounced the rights of conversation and representation', even though he supports prisoners' art on the grounds of anti-racism today (CA, 47).

Rights thus require artistic creation or *poesis*, not just law or politics. The arts speak to human rights by articulating 'aspirational values' through 'instructive aesthetic experience'. By articulating empathy, art provides a 'human measure' for aspirational thinking. This contrasts with legal and political approaches. Bhabha sees the latter as 'necessary' and 'essential to civic virtue', but too large-scale, abstract, and beyond control (WR). There is a need for poetic expression *as well as* legal or political process, so that neither becomes rigid or self-present. 'A dialogical perspective suggests that there are capacities, capabilities, and qualities of the person – both conscious and unconscious – that should welcome the imaginative, futuristic logic of poetic justice because it puts us in touch with the "paradoxical plurality of unique beings"' (DM1, 186). This creates 'a kind of doublespeak that happily condemns fiction and history to a dialogue from which neither one can easily recover the uniqueness of its voice or the singularity of its vision' (SM1, 187). There is, according to Bhabha, a particular ethic which arises from the co-constitution of 'the subject' and the supposed fact that positionalities are prior to individuals (ONO, 11). This is an ethic of accountability and hospitality to the other, in a Derridean/Levinasian sense. Aspirational values, such as freedom and fairness, do not come from the overbearing law but from affective and emotional spaces. They set people on the path to political and legal

positions. But they do not start with politics or law. The realm of Justice has to be supplemented with the realm of Love (or *Agape*). Bhabha therefore opposes approaches such as John Rawls's liberalism, which seek a kind of moral universality without reference to emotions. Injecting 'love' into 'law' gives the latter an element of reconciliation, rather than decision. In some ways, this is a restatement of Bhabha's sympathy for Derrida's *Force of Law* (see above, 683-690), with 'law' rendered as 'justice' and Derrida's 'justice' rendered as 'love'. It is notable, however, in associating the aspect of Derridean justice and compassion explicitly with creativity, narration, and the arts. It is also notable in affirming the political primacy of negative affects in Bhabha's work.

Bhabha also wishes to contest public-private divide (CF, 64-5). He wants to reconceive the public sphere in "feminised" terms (emotion, body, memory, imagination) and rearticulate public political ties based on 'pleasure, eroticism, friendship' and new values (CF, 65). This redrawing of boundaries seems subversive of domination, particularly gender domination. However, it also has dangerous implications. Bhabha seems to corrode the barriers put up to protect micro-scale spaces from state surveillance and intrusion. These spaces are as important to colonised and subaltern peoples as to ingroups (see Chatterjee, 1993, 2006). Does Bhabha's proposal simply involve the triumph of state politics over private individuality and family/lineage connections? The main contribution of the "private" to the new, ambivalent space seems to be cultural, not structural. "Private" conservations are to be brought into public space, as they already are on social media.

Done a certain way, this reconfiguration of public discourse might entail the corrosion of modern power. A politics of affinity entails exactly this kind of shift (see Day, 2005; Ward, 1973; PM, 1983). The replacement of formal public rules with affinity (eroticism, friendship, etc) requires dismantling the state and the market. But this is not Bhabha's goal. He does not seek to destroy institutions such as law courts and parliaments. And he does not deal with difficult questions, such as how to handle children without segregating them into families or schools. One must assume, therefore, that he wishes to retain the structure of public life, while importing into it the affects and "poesis" of the private sphere. Retaining these institutions without the clarity and boundaries of rule-driven reason may make them even more dangerous. If one seeks to bring emotion and affinity into statist space, one may well end up with the aestheticisation of politics (see above, 38) and thus with populism.

In a work on W.E.B Du Bois, Bhabha presents a reading of the author's position which may well reflect Bhabha's own beliefs. He suggests that, for Du Bois, minority agency is enunciation. It involves representing a community 'in the very act of political poiesis' (BSDP, 150). In other words, the group is partly constituted by its speech. It is spoken in terms of its agency, not simply as an object. The message of this speech is not just a demand for respect. The act of narrating is itself an ethical practice. It involves 'becoming a responsibility' for the other (BSDP, 150). In other words, black speech consists mainly in interpellating white people as witnesses. It involves demanding that white people take ethical responsibility for black people, in a Levinasian sense. For Bhabha, therefore, there is something particularly empowering in the politics of demand. Oppressed groups are seen as obtaining agency by demanding responsibility from privileged groups. In this account, Du Bois's socialism is unsurprisingly downplayed. However, his critique of nation-states is briefly mentioned (BSDP, 151). He is said to have had 'enduring doubts about the protection and representation of minorities by the nation-state' (BSDP, 152). Yet Bhabha ultimately endorses the nation-state. Du Bois, in contrast, sympathises with internationalist socialism. This key difference is elided.

Bhabha's work criticises the formalism of liberal approaches. It exposes the latent inhumanity of theories such as Rawls's and Nozick's, which attempt to derive ethical principles from a logical calculus. Such approaches end up, often against their will, by reinforcing the valuation of systems of instrumental rationality which bulldoze over real lives because of their conviction that the field of desire, affect and the unconscious 'counts for nothing' (see Guattari, 1996:137). The counterposing of art and law, while oversimplistic, follows from 1960s/70s critiques of instrumental reason. Theorists such as the Situationists, Deleuze, Castoriadis, Cixous, and Barthes similarly contrast artistic creation, as an embodiment of life and affirmative power, with rigid, formalistic, 'dead' systems.

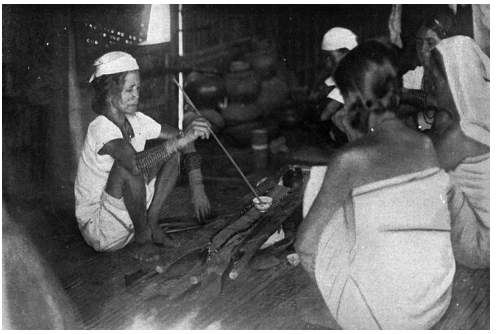
In contrast with many of these writers, however, Bhabha is quick to oppose any idea that one has to choose between the two approaches – art or law. In other words, he is determined to keep state power in place. He thus steps back from the radical 'aesthetic' critique of capitalism mounted by some of the 60s/70s theorists. However, he seeks to extend recognition to the affective, aesthetic aspect of life alongside the legal, political aspect. Law should never be seen as truly universal or impartial – though Bhabha allows it to continue pretending to be. This is broadly in line with Derrida's approach to law. Bhabha also interprets the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in a Derridean way. He argues, for instance, that the idea of a person 'as a member of society' is a strange composite of divergent 'second-generation rights' (AI). These rights presumably also have their roots in *poesis*.

Bhabha is/was optimistic about the use of liberal processes as vents for the *poesis* of marginalised groups. He thus advocates some kind of incomplete reconciliation of formalism with expressionism. This reconciliation has taken serious blows from the authoritarian developments of the 2000s and 2010s. In 2003, however, Bhabha reaffirms his approach to law and rights in the post-9/11 world. He opposes the idea that justice means applying general ideas to 'cases' (a common idea in legal scholarship). According to Bhabha, this approach necessarily ranks different cases in a problematic way. Instead, he sees a process of dialogue about difference and oppression. He believes that this dialogue is the main source of progress in terms of concrete justice (MD, 75). Justice is served when the legal system becomes able to hear difference and hear the experience of oppression. Bhabha calls for people to make claims on the basis of equality which do not amount to equalisation. Instead, their claims recognise difference (MD, 75-6). The 'dream of the 80s' which Bhabha articulates in this article involves a desire to realise equality and rights. It does not presuppose that they already exist. The idea of 'equality-in-difference', which does not depend on human similarity, is a particular recurring theme (e.g. BSDP, 148; SS, 142).

However, Bhabha is affected by growing pessimism. Writing in 2003, Bhabha argues that his own view of difference is spoken with an '80s accent'. It seems almost out-of-place in later times. The 80s idea of valuing difference has been undermined. It is now 'haunted by horror and doubt' stemming from terrorism, securitisation and war (MD, 76). However, Bhabha maintains that the dream is still achievable. To achieve it, we don't just need political tolerance. We also need a 'virtuosity of cultural *poesis*' (MD, 237). In other words, the dream requires that everyone develop a competency in cross-cultural aestheticised speech similar to Bhabha's. This seems sufficiently unlikely to make the article feel almost hopeless.

Discussing Bhabha's approach to rights, Huddart argues that Bhabha sees global rights agreements as limited by their nation-based frame. They insufficiently protect the rights of non-national cultures. Looking from a postcolonial point of view provides a parallax view – which means that the object changes when the observer changes position (Huddart, 2006:83). Rights discourses need *both* an administrative rationality *and* poetic expression (2006:88). The poetic aspect of critique is necessary to throw into question the justice of an existing order. Yet it also serves to validate unjust orders because of their ontological necessity, just as in like Derrida's theory of law and justice.

On a more concrete level, Bhabha's approach might resonate with alternatives to dominant court systems. According to one reader of Bhabha, the Gacaca courts in Rwanda might qualify as a third space. They exist somewhere between the ideals of neutrality and confrontation. They thus allow people to confront social trauma together (Byrne, 2009:150). Gacaca courts are based on a similar process in pre-colonial Rwanda, which was mainly restorative. It is common for indigenous and peasant societies to use restorative justice processes, focused on restoring a supposed equilibrium and reintegrating deviants, rather than on punitive processes. These processes are easier to use in societies where people in small communities have multiple, dense, complex relations with one another (see B. Black, 2015).



However, the current version of Gacaca courts has not dispensed with a retributive element (though usually community sentences rather than prison). Human rights groups have criticised the trials for the lack of lawyers and legal rights, and widespread corruption. Some have questioned whether they really have much in common with traditional Gacaca courts. The government also carefully excluded the crimes of its own faction from the process. This reading also raises other difficulties. If Gacaca courts are a third space, are all forms of indigenous restorative justice third spaces? The difficulty in answering this stems from Bhabha's refusal to recognise a distinct non-western tradition. It is common enough for indigenous movements to articulate alternatives to western approaches to "justice", education, health and so on. Although often hybrid, these approaches are usually articulated in an antagonistic way, as alternatives to 'white' or 'colonial' institutions. But Bhabha's approach mostly relies on repurposing dominant western-style institutions. It seems that, in fact, there is more space for concrete alternatives than Bhabha allows.

Bhabha's Political Program: Development, Literacy and Education

Bhabha is generally reticent about the kind of political changes he wants to see. However, there are rare exceptions. These generally indicate Bhabha's affinity with progressive liberal cosmopolitan and Third Way approaches. Bhabha does not fully embrace the Washington Consensus agenda. He demands various supplementary rights which challenge it to some

degree. But none of these rights fundamentally challenge the structure of the global economy. They are broadly similar to the demands articulated in the post-Washington Consensus reforms. The post-Washington Consensus was introduced in the 1990s as a result of discontent over the more overtly neoliberal Washington Consensus. It retains the Washington Consensus emphasis on free trade, deregulation, and low state spending, but it also adds social, developmental, "governance", and environmental aspects. It seeks to reconcile neoliberal economics with goals such as "equity", development, and democracy.

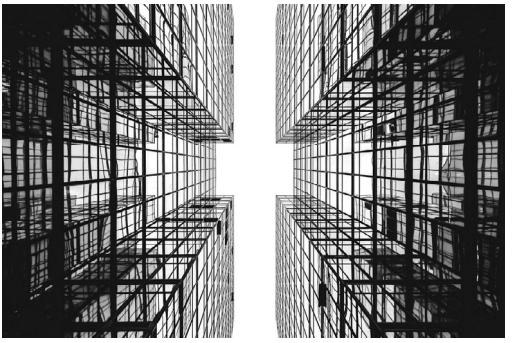
Redressing global inequalities is perhaps Bhabha's most radical demand. At one point he calls for 'something like a "right" to equitable development' (RF, xviii). This implicitly challenges the neoliberal agenda. He praises NGOs, social movements and human rights groups for resisting the 'coercive cultures of univocal choice' in global capitalism (RF, xviii). He also identifies this right with Amartya Sen's liberal theory of 'development as freedom' (RF, xxvii), which entails a corresponding right to development. And he insists that the non-realisation of the right to development is due to Southern governments as well as the 'international community' (RF, xxvii). Noticeably, he doesn't refer specifically, either to western neocolonialism, or transnational bodies like the IMF. Bhabha here stands in the tradition of writers like Frantz Fanon and Samir Amin, who seek radical wealth redistributions to redress the violence of colonialism. However, his association with Sen's liberalism suggests that his horizon is more reformist than revolutionary. Compared to post-development approaches, *buen vivir*, and even alternative development, Bhabha's agenda seems very mainstream. Global capitalism will continue, but its benefits will be distributed more equitably. However, he decorates this position with militant rhetoric (see above, 274-6).

The New Times group's "long march through the institutions" is particularly resonant in one passage: 'The politics of difference enters the well-established world of equal dignity in camouflage carrying an identical basket of rights and immunities. But once inside the realm of "universal equality", the *belated* agent of "difference" unmasks herself, produces a gun from the shopping basket, and holds universality and equality to random' (ONO, 13). This is, of course, only *metaphorical* violence, enacted on abstractions like "universality" and "equality". Nonetheless, it is remarkable that Bhabha wishes to dress up a moderate point of view in such graphically extreme forms. Such rhetoric doubtless makes his work less, rather than more, appealing to the mainstream; it undermines his professed strategy of camouflage. It makes sense, however, if he is giving a revolutionary veneer to reformist politics, or trying to cast reformist tactics as having revolutionary results.

In another passage, Bhabha insists on the importance of literacy. Literacy is necessary so one can be responsible to oneself. It is also an equalising force (SPD, 382). This effectively associates Bhabha with Third Way modernisation agendas, which often involve literacy promotion. Although literacy is also desirable for social democrats and certain revolutionaries (such as Paulo Freire), its current meaning is connected to the basic needs agenda promoted by the World Bank as part of the post-Washington Consensus. One of the central was the post-Washington Consensus bridges egalitarian and neoliberal discourses is through the idea of education as a panacea. It is maintained that basic education will overcome poverty by empowering the poor and increasing employability. Education, cultural change, and "good governance" are used as substitutes for economic redistribution. They are claimed to bridge the gap between neoliberal inequality and social needs. However, Bhabha also includes in the right to literacy a wider definition of literacy as 'intervention', or the ability to reconfigure discourses (SPD, 382). In other words, literacy also entails learning poststructuralist strategic techniques. Shang Anfeng asks Bhabha about how to realise the right to narrate, with a focus on western hegemony in media, film and music. Bhabha responds that 'developing countries... first need to commit

themselves to the right to narrate by making a greater commitment to public education', on which democratic and representational rights 'substantially' depend (MGM, 178). He also expresses vague sympathy with attempts to create independent Southern media systems (MGM, 179).

In reality, education often expands social control (see Firth and Robinson, 2017). The World Bank agenda promotes global cultural colonisation of the poor through expansions in low-quality, authoritarian education which is focused on integrating people into modern, commodified economies (see Genge, 2001; Smith, 1997; Shunear, 1993; Bloch, 2005:). Expanding literacy may entail expanding legibility, and therefore, state control. Training people to interact with dominant institutions and their categories may empower people within these structures, but it also undermines autonomy from them. Even if Bhabha adds particular critical literacy demands, this still seems to operate at the level of changing the *content* of schooling, rather than its structure. It is certainly far less radical than the deschooling approaches pioneered by earlier anti-colonial writers (Illich, 1971). Like Illich, Žižek (2019) has recently suggested that education is simply a capital sink. Most graduates are building up debts without gaining either important knowledge or social opportunities. One can also add how easily the right to education becomes a duty - i.e. a duty to submit to schooling as an endless extraction of unremunerated labour in building up one's "human capital". This is what is argued by Harris (2017). Education as a precondition for the right to narrate effectively restricts this right to people who have already learned how to conform. It does not force the system to accept rights of people outside its control. This is entirely consistent with Bhabha emphasis on internal subversion.



This largely uncritical relationship to the World Bank development agenda is revealing in terms of the limits to Bhabha's conception of difference. While there are certainly strong arguments that literacy can be empowering, it can also be seen as a tool of domination. It is no surprise that Bhabha emphasises its empowering potential. The ability to conform to colonialism and capitalism, to perform *inside* their scripts as a mimic, is vital to his view of transformative agency. Oral culture, a 'refusal of literacy' (1988), entails refusing the entire game of representational 'writing' which Bhabha values (even though on a Derridean definition, all culture is 'writing'). Literacy and education are important because they make people, in a crucial sense, the same. It seems that Bhabha, like the liberals he criticises, can only accept difference up to a point - until it challenges his basic assumptions. In insisting that everyone be the right kind of hybrid, mimic-man, semi-included subject, Bhabha actually reproduces discourses of colonisation which exclude more radically different positions.

The Right to Narrate

Bhabha's biggest contribution to human rights theory is his articulation of a new right: the right to narrate. On Bhabha's definition, this is an aspirational cultural right (WR). It is very different from either a right to protection of cultural heritage, or a right to free speech and/or expression. In Bhabha's theory, cultures are seen as constantly moving, shifting and hybridising. Whereas dominant human rights discourses posit rights within, or of, existing cultures, Bhabha posits a right to cultural production or cultural difference through the right to narrate. Hence, the right to narrate is about relative discursive power. The main issue is about *control* of the narrative, and not its contents. From Bhabha's point of view, the question of 'who gets to tell a culture's stories' is more important than what the stories are (Huddart, 2006:92). The right to narrate includes, for example, rights to represent, and to disrupt naturalised assumptions (WR, 180). According to some readers, its main point is to allow people to introduce or reintroduce reminders of the processual, changing nature of culture (Huddart, 2006:94). However, it also entails obligations on others. It includes a right to 'speak and be heard', and thus, a right to receive respectful attention to one's signs (DD, 34). Hence, it is very different from a right to free speech or free expression. It imposes extensive demands on the listener – demands which are closely connected to the assumption of co-constitutivity. It entails a duty to listen, and presumably, to learn from the resultant discomfort.

Bhabha's idea of a right to narrate may be related to the idea of silence as a central aspect of oppression. The verb 'to silence' and the corresponding term 'silencing' are often encountered in critical theory today. In one of the early examples, Paulo Freire (1970b) talks about cultures of silence in the context of the dictatorship in Brazil. Workers and peasants were unable to "speak their own word" because of illiteracy, political oppression, and lack of consciousness. In a culture of silence, people are not aware that human agency is transformative. Instead, people internalise an idea of themselves as objects. They become fatalistic and resign themselves to surviving from day to day. Freirean education is largely an attempt to free people from such a culture of silence by helping them to speak their own word. It is closely connected to fighting the dependent status of peripheral or colonised countries. Through revolutionary processes, silence comes to be seen as a socially constructed relation rather than a brute fact of life.

Similarly, in James Scott's work, moments when people can "speak truth to power" have a charismatic effect. They rupture the dominant "public transcript" and create an insurrectionary situation (see above, 513-14). If the disruptive speech is not effectively silenced, it directly challenges power. For example, a feudal serf who refuses to offer deference to a lord, and instead calls him a tyrant or a thief, is putting forward a revolutionary challenge. Situationist theory includes a concept of 'public secrets', which are things which (roughly) everyone knows but nobody says (e.g. Knabb, 1997). For example, in the 1950s it was a 'public secret' that most people were bored and dissatisfied. On the surface, everyone pretended they were living the good life arising from rising standards of living. In 1963, Betty Friedan blew the lid on 'housewife malaise', a pattern of psychological suffering experienced by women who had achieved what were then conventional life-goals.

This helped to create the climate for feminism in the 1970s. Similar processes were used historically in Maoist China, in the form of public venting of anger against landlords and other real or perceived oppressors. This cathartic release involved a break with a long history of dependency and deference (Solomon, 1971). Peasants' anger had previously been choked back or 'silenced' because of landlords' social and political power. Its release was a powerful political force.

Elizabeth Wood (2001) has written about the emotional effects of peasant insurgency in El Salvador. This Central American country used to be ruled by an authoritarian American-backed dictatorship. It used the latifundia system in which peasants worked in abject conditions on large plantations owned by politically powerful landowners, producing goods for export. Many peasants joined or supported the guerrilla insurgency launched by the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) in the 1980s. There was a long and brutal civil war. The civil war ended in a stalemate and pacted transition in 1992, which preserved capitalism in El Salvador but included some degree of redistribution of land.

Wood interviewed peasants who took part in the uprising. She found that their main motives were to defy authorities they resented, stand up to injustice and repression, and assert their own dignity in the face of contempt and violence. The assertion of agency, of a capacity to act, was itself a central motivation for agency. Revolt was experienced as a necessary expression of being human, whereas submission dehumanises. Interviewees use metaphors where they portray themselves as previously bent-over and deferential, and now standing tall. This process of 'standing up' had

emotional benefits which sustained participation even when it was very risky and provided few benefits. People felt themselves to be agents making history. They saw a gulf between their former abject position and their current situation of agency and defiance. In situations of domination, the exercise of voice – often angry, antagonistic voice – feels extremely liberating. Similar accounts of feeling humanised, empowered as an agent for the first time, and of life suddenly seeming more meaningful and 'magical', also appear in participant accounts of autonomous social movements.

Smaller-scale cultures of silence can exist, for example, around abuse within a family or a social group. Recent discussions of silencing and voice often relate to the issue of trauma. For instance, Judith Herman's seminal work *Trauma and Recovery* (Herman, 1997) places great emphasis on voice. Trauma generally arises from experiences of severely distressing or overwhelmingly stressful experiences, usually involving threat of death or serious injury, the death of someone close, or extreme forms of control, dehumanisation or psychological disruption. Examples of traumatic experiences include deaths of comrades in wartime, childhood sexual abuse, violent or controlling relationships, natural disasters, rape, torture, concentration camps, and near-fatal car accidents. Some of the events discussed by Bhabha – such as violent colonisation, enslavement, and forced displacement – are likely to lead to trauma. There is even evidence that trauma is transmitted intergenerationally as a result of these kinds of historical events (Danieli ed., 1998; Duran and Duran, 1995; DeGruy, 2005). People are generally understood to vary in their "resilience", or how easy or hard it is for them to become traumatised. Trauma tends to destroy a person's enjoyment of life, their identity, their social and worldly relationships, and the reference-points for their sense of meaning and purpose. Traumatic experiences lead to a collapse of someone's sense of self and personal coordinates, and their sense of meaning, order, justice, and causal explanation in the world. Survivors feel unable to either affirm or deny the reality of the traumatic experience.

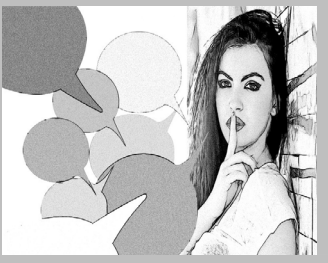
Silencing is often an important aspect of trauma. Traumatic contexts, such as armies, prisons and abusive relationships, are often themselves silencing and disempowering. Survivors are threatened or disbelieved as a matter of course. Other people often try to hide from the horrific and apparently extraordinary events which cause trauma. In the case of gendered violence, trauma can be hidden because of the 'private' nature of family life. But silencing happens even with groups such as war veterans whose contributions are socially valued. In addition to this social-level silencing, trauma survivors struggle to narrate their own experiences. Narration and voice are tied-up with identity and social relationships, and so, are also disrupted by trauma. The silence and inaction of bystanders is often a particular focus for survivors' anger. Having witnesses who can affirm and validate the survivor's experience is a crucial aspect of healing. This is why trauma is usually only revealed when a supportive political context or movement exists.

Herman encourages a model of therapy in which trauma survivors reconstruct the stories of their lives as linear narratives. (As we have seen, Bhabha dislikes any such narrative closure). Survivors may initially disavow or repress the traumatic memory, or recount fragmented details. They may be uncertain about basic details of the story. The goal of therapy is for the survivor to recount the entire experience and re-experience it while remaining rooted in a safe present context, and then to integrate this experience into a full life-narrative. The new story replaces a story about shame and humiliation with one about dignity and virtue in the face of adversity. Narration reconstitutes the survivor as a person and allows them to regain some of what they have lost. It alters the mental processing of the traumatic event.

Testimony – or giving voice to the traumatic experience – is thus conceived as a crucial part of the healing process. Testifying is difficult, because traumatic memories are generally inarticulate and do not come together as a coherent narrative. They are unconscious in Freud's sense, or in neuroscientific terms, "stuck in the limbic system". For Herman, the process of learning to articulate a traumatic experience in standard narrative form is part of its processing and integration into "normal" memory. Testifying helps to disconnect the traumatic memory from the fight-flight responses which cause symptoms such as flashbacks and hypervigilance. However, other therapists argue that visualisation or emotional processing are more important than narration. For example, Naparstek (2007) found that recounting traumatic experiences might simply lead to re-experiencing the trauma. She thinks it is more important to visualise rather than narrate the experience.

The themes of voice and silence are particularly associated with feminism. Some feminist philosophers claim that women emphasise voice when depicting their experiences, whereas men emphasise visual experience (Belenky et al., 1986). In 1978, Tilly Olson wrote a book titled 'Silences' (Olson, 1978), which argued that the underrepresentation of women in literature was a form of marginalisation. Women's voices are either not speaking, not heard, not understood, or not preserved – and these are all forms of silencing. Because women don't appear as often as men in novels, their experiences are less visible and more easily ignored. Studies such as Ussher and Perz (2010), Kim (2015), and Smolak (2010) suggest that men silence themselves at least as much as women. But the social and discursive meaning of self-silencing is different for most women and men, meaning the psychological harm to women is greater. Women tend to self-silence so as to maintain relationships. On the other hand, men usually self-silence to appear stoical, stable, or unemotional. Men self-silence mainly to avoid relationships or relationship conflict. Self-silencing correlates with (and may cause) depression, stress, and eating disorders. However, conventionally masculine character-traits provide resilience against these apparent effects.

Ideas of silencing and voice have come to play a central role in radical theory. To call something 'silencing' is sometimes enough to (paradoxically) silence it. Silencing effects can be attributed to general discourses, as well as particular acts. For example, some feminists, such as Catharine MacKinnon and Rae Langton, maintain that pornography performs an 'illocutionary silencing'. This phrase means that it creates a situation where women's speech-acts are circumscribed. Rae Langton argues that porn silences women. It effectively commands men to view women as sexual objects, and confers a right to commit sexual violence. It defines sexual roles in such a way as to take away the right to say 'no' and be heard as saying 'no'. Langton suggests that porn makes 'some potential speech acts... unspeakable for women' (1993:299). An actor in a stage play is assumed to be playing a role. This means that the actor can shout a warning to the audience about a real danger, and the audience will not take the warning seriously. They will asssume it is part of the performance. Langton argues that porn has this effect on women's ability to say 'no' in sexual situations. It rarely depicts women saying 'no' to sex, and it depicts situations where 'no' means 'yes'. This interferes with men's ability to hear and understand a woman saying 'no' in real life. Porn defines sex as a language-game in such a way that 'no' does not count as meaning 'no'. This means that men can commit rape 'without even knowing it' (Wolf, 1991:167). It also makes it hard for women to testify about abuse, without this tesimony seeming sexually exciting to men. It contributes to a hostile communicative climate for women.



These arguments are criticised by other feminist writers, as well as liberals. Critics doubt that porn has such a consistent anti-consent message, or that its influence on sexual norms is so decisive. For example, Saul (2006) argues that context is important. The same speech-act has different effects in

different contexts. A feminist viewing porn for reasons of critique would not suffer illocutionary silencing. Therefore, only some instances of viewing can logically count as silencing. But this means that the context, not the text, causes silencing. Saul also argues that porn makers do not have anything like enough authority or cultural recognition to issue binding commands to their audience. A range of actors including peer groups, families, sex educators in schools, and other forms of popular culture also play important roles in defining sexual norms. Langton's idea of 'silencing' is closely connected to Catharine MacKinnon's (1989) highly state-centric feminism, which seeks to use the law as a tool in a zero-sum struggle for power between men and women. Like Bhabha, MacKinnon seeks to create moments of change and disjuncture in order to render institutions accountable to the concrete experiences of the marginalised. For MacKinnon, this involves increased criminalisation and the corrosion of procedural protections such as legal precedent and the requirement that offenders intend to commit a crime in order to be guilty. While seeking to overcome the 'male' nature of legal reasoning, this approach actually strengthens the power of the state.

In today's identity politics, 'silencing' has come to mean any of a series of things which are perceived as ways of shutting people up when they talk about oppression. This does not only mean preventing people from speaking, but also not believing them or taking them seriously. As in the MacKinnon/Langton case, it can include entire classes of discourse which are believed to create a climate unconducive to exercising voice. Anything which reduces the ability of people from groups designated as oppressed to challenge or dissent from their oppression is described as silencing. This might include bullying, intimidation, shaming, interrupting or 'talking over' someone, or denying the legitimacy of someone's voice. But it can also include particular truth-claims. Some feminist websites list claims such as

'men also suffer due to patriarchy', 'someone else told me it wasn't sexist', 'he has a right to free speech', or 'those are the rules' as silencing techniques. Even something like objecting to displays of anger or using humour to defuse a conflictual situation can be considered silencing. It is even suggested that such tactics are somehow "designed" for the purpose of silencing dissent and protecting privilege (see Genderbitch, 2009; Geek Feminism, n.d.). They are taken to violate the right to narrate, because they put obstacles in the way of the narrator being "heard".

In practice, this articulation of the right to narrate means that an ostensibly marginalised person has almost infinite discursive space to articulate claims free from disagreement, while an ostensibly privileged person must simply accept and obey. Anything which doesn't affirm the oppressed person's claims of victimhood or agency might be deemed an instance of silencing. In extreme cases, this leads to opponents of silencing literally silencing their opponents – for instance, by shouting them down or shutting down their events. Because of the priority given to structural oppression and the relative distribution of voice, the prohibition on silencing only works in one direction. The right to narrate has thus evolved into the idea that someone suffers a fundamental rights violation because someone else disagrees with, argues against, disbelieves, reframes, or ignores certain classes of truth-claims and demands. This has the effect of destroying other rights (such as free speech, free expression, freedom from discrimination, and religious freedom; c.f. Eyre, 2000) and making many types of conversation impossible. It even degenerates into situations where people from different marginalised groups, such as transgender women and cisgender radical feminists, or black women and white women, accuse one another of "silencing".

Despite its controversial political effects, this idea of silencing gets much of its force from the more established ideas of speaking truth to power, overcoming cultures of silence, and using voice to heal from trauma. From a point of view close to Bhabha's, Solnit suggests that the 'right to speak' is a vital form of wealth which is being 'redistributed'. This is vitally important because silence is a 'living death', because stories 'save your life' and 'are your life', and because speech 'brings about inclusion, recognition: the rehumanisation that undoes dehumanisation'. We are our stories', our 'truth' (Solnit, 2017). In a sense, this is a rearticulation of Freirean, Scottian, and trauma-focused theories of voice. But in another sense, it reduces life to discourse and representation, and politics to competition for voice. It is also revealing that this rehumanisation is taken to entail punishing others and being recognised as part of the status quo. One gains voice within the system, not against it. This is a fundamentally system-affirming agenda, which seeks to reshuffle roles within the dominant system, not to overturn it.

In addition to this reformist and carceral tendency, there are a number of difficulties with the "right to narrate", especially if it entails a right not to be "silenced" in the broad sense. How does this work if several oppressed people have distinct and incompatible narratives? And does this ethical theory require one to accept (for instance) the claims of a paranoiac that they are being controlled by mind-beams or that their neighbour is plotting against them? Another problem with the right to narrate is that it focuses on the speakable and representable aspects of experience. People whose experiences are so far from the norm that they cannot be articulated in language will not be able to take advantage of the right. It tends to reduce people to representable selves inside social discourse. If 'we are our stories', then what is left of us outside language? For instance, what status do affects/emotions, or sensory experience have? By reducing people to words, discourse theory flattens life and turns people into nodes in representational networks – nothing more than a collection of speech-acts or social media posts. And if Bhabha is right that identity is constitutively split and meaning is always deferred, the situation is even worse: it is impossible to be heard.

Another problem is that narration can turn into a clamour among different oppressed groups to be seen and heard by the powerful, rather than a struggle to claim autonomy. Richard Day (2005) criticises the "politics of demand" for keeping people trapped in codependent relationships with the powerful, instead of breaking with them and forming self-affirming affinity networks. Continuing to rely on validation by the powerful – on being "heard" inside the system – reaffirms and reinforces the power of the powerful, their ability to determine one's own value. There is also an anomaly that, on a Scottian model, publicly speakable experiences which do not lead to either insurrection or retraumatisation are almost by definition not radical. Hidden transcripts by their very nature cannot be publicly narrated except as part of a revolutionary process. Also, silence is not always a matter of feeling afraid to speak. Silence can also be a way of finding peace. It can symbolise a sublime relationship to the world. Mystics and monks may choose to be silent because the most important things cannot be said. Finally, if psychoanalysis is right, then people are rarely aware of the inner motivations for their beliefs and narratives. There will often be unconscious processes such as projection and rationalisation at work in the construction of each person's narrative. The "right to narrate" puts these processes beyond analysis and criticism. It reinforces whatever rationalisations sustain a person's current identity and social functioning – contrary to Bhabha's subversive intent.

The origins of this proposed right may well lie in the assumption of co-constitutivity and the exaggerated importance Bhabha attaches to culture, language, writing and theory as sites of political action. Bhabha assumes that real effects in the real world are actually side-effects of ways in which identities and meanings are constructed in language. Someone who is stereotyped, or whose narrative is silenced, is therefore not simply disrespected or offended. There is a direct, causal relationship between their being 'constructed' as inferior

and their dehumanisation in real life. The important thing for Bhabha, however, is not the content of stereotypical claims. It is not enough to replace stereotypes with accurate or positive representations. The important thing is the distribution of the power to speak. This idea that having voice, being heard, being validated, and being put in the position of 'speaking subject' matters more than the content of ideas has been highly influential in contemporary identity politics. It often manifests as aggressive demands to listen to and validate hostile beliefs directed towards dominant groups and politicised accounts of everyday experience, backed by sanctions of exclusion or name-calling against those deemed to have violated the right. This has arguably had disastrous effects for radical and centre-left politics.

These effects are not the only problems with the proposed right. A right to narrate is ultimately a right to autonomously form one's own worldview. It entails the rejection of metanarratives, or general stories within which one's own story is contained. General social structures which decide on authoritative narratives, and distinguish between true and false, would by implication have to be abolished. This seems to include fields such as law, hierarchical politics, and maybe even science. One ends up, logically, with a radical perspectivism, akin to Feyerabend's (1975) 'anarchist theory of knowledge' (and this is not necessarily a bad thing).

However, in Bhabha's work, the right to narrate is not posited against dominant legal structures. Instead, the two are somehow combined. In other words, Bhabha's rejection of essentialism, rationalism, the modern subject and so on, do not lead to a rejection and

attempted overthrow of institutions which rely on these assumptions. Instead, it leads to their 'strategic' use. At most, there is hope for a cultural regime of checks-and-balances. Authoritarian culture and politics are warded off through constant reminders of situatedness and process, and through other practices which introduce a poetic element. This is consistent with Derrida's treatment of the relationship between law and justice (see above, 683-690). Politically, it is fundamentally conservative. It fails to follow through the logical implications of the posited right. Another difficulty is that narration is never final. As Bhabha well knows, the ultimate meaning of language is deferred. Language and power-structures can always be reclaimed and reinflected in unexpected ways. This makes it constitutively impossible to be "heard".

Another problem here is that Bhabha seems to deny a 'right to narrate' both to his adversaries and the texts he reads. He disrespectfully dismisses those he wants 'no truck with', and he reads texts in ways which ignore the author's main concerns. This raises the worry that the right to narrate is actually simply a right to say and do those things Bhabha agrees with: to disrupt fixed assumptions and to affirm constitutive negativity. Others can access the right to narrate only if they adhere to the appropriate structural grammar of narration. For instance, someone only has a right to narrate if they their claims in constructivist rather than essentialist terms. If so, Bhabha is simply seeking a 'right' or a duty for everyone to adhere to the same meta-theory, as a precondition for communicative recognition. One has a right to narrate provided one narrates the same old story (Derridean deferral and co-constitutivity) with only minor variations. In practice, the right to narrate turns into a right to be heard and believed, provided one uses the correct signifiers. These signifiers take on an almost magical power.

Also, a right to narrate, if fully realised, will also be claimed by 'privileged' people, even by bigots. If causing someone to feel silenced or otherwise distressed is a rights violation, students and other "service users" across various sectors can complain whenever they find something distressing. Progressives and anti-racists then become victims of the very prohibitions (on silencing, disbelieving, disagreeing, and so on) which they pioneered. Hence, there is now a phenomenon of conservative and far-right students using the same complaints of silencing, triggering, and hostile environments which were formerly used by liberals and radicals, to target liberal lecturers from the right. This means that junior lecturers' contracts are not renewed because students complain about (for instance) being assigned postcolonial texts such as those of Edward Saïd (Schlosser, 2015; McCormick, 2016). Bhabha's own texts, which he admits seek to cause discomfort, transgress boundaries, or even panic 'colonisers', might be a potential target for such complaints – were it not for the improbability of right-wing undergraduates understanding a word he's saying!

When Bhabha proposed a 'right to narrate', it was speculative and aspirational. But one can now track in practice the consequences of a 'right to narrate'. Initially, one sees a liberal (left-of-centre) college professor afraid of being accused of violating the right to narrate of his identity-politics-inspired students, because of the ease with which they can use disciplinary procedures against him. Later, this becomes even more sinister: right-wing, sometimes far-right, students use the same discourses and procedures to attack beliefs they dislike, to the detriment of radical perspectives such as Bhabha's. In a way, this is unsurprising. Contemporary alt-right politics is itself a variety of identity politics, formed in imitation of the identity politics of marginalised groups (see Haider, 2017). It is easy enough to assert that the alt-right's claims to be oppressed are not comparable to those of marginalised groups (although hard to defend if one starts from constructivist premises). The difficulty, however, is that it throws doubt on whether the right to narrate is a viable right at all. There seems to be no sufficiently general way of defining the right to narrate so as to render its impact progressive overall. It would be necessary to

supplement the right with a limited field of application, so that only marginalised subjects can appeal to it. Yet this requires a shift in the type of discourse: either a political conflict as to which groups are protected, or some kind of objective truth-claim about who is 'really' oppressed.

Post-9/11 Panic

Bhabha responds to 9/11 in a predictable manner. As usual, Bhabha's response to ideologies he dislikes is to insist on ambiguity and denounce others for essentialism. This seems, however, to miss aspects of the 9/11 event. The event was an extreme case, at the very heart of global power, of the wider uncertainty, disjuncture and disruption which characterised the 1990s. In a sense, Bhabha got what he wanted: the generalisation of anxiety as disruption of identity. The generalised panic caused by the distribution of chapatis in the Indian 'Mutiny' has again occurred. Colonial identity shifted from a 'narcissist' to a 'paranoid' pole. Yet this has not produced a collapse of colonial power. Rather, it has intensified colonial violence. One might say the same about the rise of the alt-right and the Charlottesville demonstration: the paranoid pole of colonialism is now on display, the same as in the 'Mutiny'. But what does one do now? The failure of a Bhabhaesque affective moment to produce politically progressive effects reveals the limits to his theory. In addition, the changed post-9/11 context marginalised the type of politics on which Bhabha's work was based. Hybrid, syncretic mimicry within dominant structures depends on the existence of a dominant system which is at least rhetorically and

marginally committed to inclusion. While inclusion and diversity rhetoric did not vanish in the 2000s, it was increasingly subordinated to discourses of 'security', 'cohesion' and 'citizenship'. Intellectuals, activists and NGOs who had been incorporated into the mainstream in the 1990s were wrong-footed. Having evacuated oppositional politics, critical theory is left powerless against a rightist political turn.

Bhabha's analysis is thus politically relevant in an unexpected way. Since 9/11, the world has been *permanently* in the zone Bhabha celebrates – 'a war of nerves and sporadic guerrilla action' (LC, 204) conditioned by mutual incomprehension, constant uncertainty, anxiety, panic, and the high-speed proliferation of ambiguous or meaningless "signs" which are not representable "symbols". This is unsurprising, since 9/11 is disruptive in Bhabha's sense. People expect aeroplanes to stay in the sky, iconic buildings to keep standing, and they don't expect to die when they go into work. And the reasons for the attack are not instantly comprehensible to westerners. It is a sign of something wrong in the world, but not a clear symbol. 9/11 ruptures fixed certainties of western identities. This has certainly contributed to the corrosion of modern rationality as a locus of attachment, the stability of western subjects, and the experience of the world (at least for the privileged) as a secure, ordered place. If sporadic destabilisation is part of a 'war of nerves' against the modern subject, then it seems this war is already won. The contemporary western subject is permanently anxious (IPC, 2014), easily drawn into mediatised panics (Baudrillard, 1983), and ever more associated with survival in an endless darkness, rather than with progress, reason, diversity or liberal values. Yet this does not seem to have brought us any closer to liberation from capitalism, colonialism or statism. Rather, it has unleashed a wave of recolonisation, securitisation, and recomposition and conflict of reactive and reactionary social forces among both colonisers and colonised. Indeed, the pervasive affects of anxiety, hopelessness and panic have contributed to the composition and stabilisation of the current social formation. Bhabha's gamble on the radical transformative effects of uncertainty and ambiguity seems to have been decisively falsified.

In another piece, Bhabha seeks to conceive 9/11 in line with his wider theory of trauma and mourning. Images of 9/11 'are not merely *cris de coeur* [cries from the heart]; they are fragments of a language of distress and dispossession, beginning to find a public voice' (PAS, 57). One comes to terms with trauma, according to Bhabha, by mourning. The War on Terror instead indulges 'fury', and produces resultant atrocities (PAS, 57-8). Repression fails because it reproduces what it represses. There was no symbolic break after 9/11 because the US state accepted the principles of its attackers: a holy war between good and evil (PAS, 59). After the event, a traumatic event or 'traumatism' is reproduced through a media 'afterlife'. This is a 'repetition compulsion' which ensures an 'anxious persistence of meaning and affect' (PAS, 58). This plays to the status of 9/11 as an ecstatic media event which compels the emotions of spectators. Bhabha does not explore how this effect was constructed through the media, or even its ethnocentric selectivity (c.f. Chouliaraki, 2006).

Bhabha cites Roxanne Euben on the contemporary significance of 'jihad' as an attempt to realise a community of Muslims. It thus arises in the inbetween zone, which involves a 'secular-messianic conjunction'. This zone is the space of the traumatised witness (PAS, 60). Bhabha is ambivalent about whether he accepts Euben's claim that 'jihadis' actually occupy this zone. Such a claim would be deeply subversive of his theory. However, he insists that the zone only explains the experience of trauma when read as indeterminable, not as confrontation (PAS, 60).

Theorising the New World Order

In many ways, Bhabha's theoretical project is tied to the early days of neoliberalism. Bhabha's best-known works were written prior to 9/11. The 1980s/90s were a period when recognition of multiculturalism was more common than it is today. The British state (usually in the form of pre-Blairite Labour councils) promoted 'minority' arts and culture, at least on a superficial level. Issues of cosmopolitan inclusion (as well as democratisation and humanitarianism) were fashionable in academia and politics. Similar trends were observable in America, Australia and Canada (though not so pronounced in continental Europe). These trends probably explain why Bhabha saw possibilities for old silences to be overcome and for migrant and minority experiences to produce disjuncture which leads to social change.

Since 9/11 there has been a tendency towards re-silencing. Multiculturalism is now widely denied (see Fekete, 2011). Colonial histories are concealed beneath resurgent nationalism. Policies of inclusion have been undercut by securitisation. The NGOs working for inclusion and democracy, and the theorists who tied their colours to the mast of democratisation, have been hit sideways by the return of authoritarianism (e.g. Donini et al., 2004). This seems to be a reassertion of the racist response to disjuncture which Bhabha theorises. However, strategies like Bhabha's did not seem to prevent this

resurgence of reaction. Indeed, the deradicalisation of critical theory from the 1980s onwards, and the corresponding NGO-isation of post-1960s social movements, arguably created the conditions for this reversal. Once opposition was contained in incorporated forms, it was easy for the state to make the terms of inclusion cumulatively more adverse. In his discussion of the Indian "Mutiny"/Revolt, Bhabha discusses the distribution of chapatis. He considers it an ambiguous practice which causes panic both among colonisers and colonised. This has unexpected political relevance. In events like 9/11, a similar state of panic and incomprehension is amplified by the mass media. This disrupts business-as-usual (for example, the stock market), but does it weaken colonial power?

Writing after 9/11, Bhabha writes that the event is not as strange as it seems. On the one hand, people believe that it comes from an alien moral universe. The attacks are so evil as to be completely alien and Other. They seem to be a foreign, savage kind of evil. But they exist alongside Hollywood movies with similar scripts. In fact, the movie titles ran alongside the names of the dead on CNN newsreels. For Bhabha, this means that 9/11 is not so alien after all. It's part of the internal script of western civilisation (TA, 3; DDR, 27). It is in a sense, therefore, extimate. He also criticises the framing of the attacks and the subsequent US war as a clash of cultures or clash of civilisations. According to Bhabha, the decision to implement terror is always political, not civilisational or cultural. The clash of civilisations narrative is itself part of the political excuse for terrorism (TA, 3). Despite using the same tactic against Fanon (see above, 875), Bhabha resents attempts to blame postcolonial theory for 9/11. 'Wasn't there some Congressional Committee that partly laid the blame of 9/11 on the rise of postcolonial studies in US universities? ... Was Osama bin Laden really so *au courant* with literary theory?' (PN3, 71). In this case, Bhabha denies any connection unless it exists on a direct, literal level - even though, by this standard, most of his own readings also fail. Instead, he suggests understanding 9/11 in relation to the removal of affect from citizenship/politics. He suggests that this explains the recurrence instead of discourses of 'martyrdom' for 'God and the nation-state' (PN3, 74).

The attacks do not, therefore, reflect a clash of irreconcilable cultures. Rather, they reflect a conflict at the heart of democracy. Democracy is an unrealisable (but necessary) ideal which must constantly be revised from its marginal points, in light of its (necessary) failure. The war at its heart is a war between universal inclusion and ethnocentrism. This is shown, for instance, by John Stuart Mill's advocacy of free speech at home and imperialism in India (DDR, 29). The divisions between ethics and epistemology, and between 'cultural description and political judgement', also express this conflict (DDR, 29). It is easy to see here another instance of Bhabha's recurring theme of the constitutive split in identity, between the definitive founding moment and the contingent, ambivalent process of repetition. The two apparently irreconcilable poles of a binary actually require and constitute one another. Against the false binary of democracy and terror, or modernity and faith, Bhabha calls for a 'less dogmatic and totalising' perspective. Such a perspective celebrates its own 'partiality' is a necessity of life (DDR, 31).

Despite this critique of dominant framings of 9/11, Bhabha implicitly endorses the US war. He argues for wide democratic participation, civil and human rights protection, and democratic solidarity rather than retaliation. But he also argues that a just society with these traits should wage just wars to create a global society. Such a society has obligations of 'common, collaborative citizenship' and can make the 'difficult decisions that "just"

wars demand' (TA, 4). This is largely consistent with a Third Way position in support of global cosmopolitan liberalism, rather than an anti-imperialist politics. Bhabha also does not rethink his position on the transgressive effects of subaltern identities in the light of an attack which would, in his view, justify such a war. By 2009, Bhabha sees his fundamental intellectual projects as best-served in the US (MGM, 177). This is presumably because of the growing power of identity politics in US universities, just at the time that imperial power was reasserting itself. Bhabha's relationship to the US is, he claims, 'at once productive and affirmative and conflictual' - but this is no different from any of his relationships, 'including my family' (MGM, 177). Every relationship is the same, since it always involves the same ambivalent inside/outside position. This underlying assumption prevents Bhabha from having to engage with the issue of how identity politics and American imperialism can coexist.

In another piece, Bhabha cites Thomas Friedman's idea of 'New World Disorder'. According to Friedman, small groups or individuals can be 'superempowered' by globalisation to disrupt the world order. In Bhabha's rephrasing of Friedman's position, the war on terror is really a battle between 'superempowered angry men from the World of Disorder' and the US superpower (SBS, 344). However, this binary also has a history. It is a global truth with two sides. The binary, like all binaries, tries to impose order on contingency and chaos. The reality is more 'contradictory and fearsome'. The world has not become a smooth mobile transnational network or a 'bricolage of borderless bazaars'. Instead, localities and global networks co-exist in unstable combinations (SBS, 344-5). The global economy has become 'regulative and conservative' in response to fluidity (SBS, 345). In this article, Bhabha comes closer to treating 9/11 as a symptom of colonial binaries than he did in earlier pieces. This is despite the fact that, elsewhere, he repeats the 'angry young man' framing of bin Laden as part of his critique of Fanon (see above, 875).

At the same time, this situation leads Bhabha to concede to certain of his critics the argument that fluidity has limits. People should not 'make heroes' of the 'victims of global capitalism', as Hardt and Negri supposedly do. They are not engaged in a 'struggle against the slavery of belonging to a nation, an identity, and a people'. Instead, they seek to settle, access services, and obtain asylum or citizenship (ONO, 3). Hence, Bhabha opposes the disruption of the nation-state as a political form. He proposes a politics of minority inclusion, similar to the multiculturalism he formerly criticised. Migrants don't simply move, but also settle, seek formal status, and make demands for welfare (SBS, 347; SS, 144). 'Positive global relations depend on the protection of these nation-based resources of the redistribution of wealth', leveraging them for a 'transnational moral economy of redistributive justice (SBS, 347; ONO, 3). Indeed, Bhabha seems to oppose the idea of 'no borders'. He embraces Derrida's view (see above, 306-8) that 'hospitality is anxiously driven between the ethics of unconditional invitation and the politics of conditional interdiction – visas; entry permits; refugee tribunals; the border police'. And, he adds, it 'must remain so' (ONO, 5). The point is not to achieve a utopian unconditional inclusion. The point is to engage in an 'ethical and political work of constant negotiation between the conditional and the unconditional, between linguistic signification and discursive, governmental regulation'. The important issue is to 'work with and around the ambivalences and antagonism that emerges [*sic*] from this interstital space of "thirdness"', i.e. from the inbetween zone (ONO, 6). This inbetween space is a 'graspable, even if unstable, site of strategy and decision' (ONO, 7). In Bhabha's ideal world, there are still

border police; they just feel more anxious and guilty about what they do.

Hence, 'it does no good at all to follow certain notions of borderlessness for their own sake' (SS, 145). This is taken to be a decisive problem for theories which 'fetishiz[e]' movement and flow (SS, 144), presumably meaning utopian globalisation approaches and those of post-autonomists like Hardt and Negri. Hence, Bhabha moves towards the liberal multiculturalist position he formerly criticised (see above, 882-5 and Chapter 9), and away from the stereotype of fetishising hybridity and movement which critics often attach to him. This follows the existing path-dependency of Bhabha's work, which sought to radicalise liberal integrationism to a point where it destroys the power of the liberal system itself. I feel in retrospect that theorists such as Bhabha saw the prospects of the 1980s/90s process of cultural liberalisation in unduly rosy terms. They saw the small moves towards recognition and inclusion as the first steps in a gradual overturning of inequality, when in fact they were temporary strategic concessions by a system preparing a backlash. This, in turn, left them disarmed when the backlash came.

CHAPTER 16

Bhabha's Politics

Interpretations and Criticisms

Positive Uses of Bhabha

Overall, Bhabha "does" politics mainly through cultural politics broadly defined. He also engages at the levels of institutional, movement, and lifestyle politics, but only occasionally, and in context-specific ways. More significant, perhaps, is the tone of his politics. He strongly opposes antagonistic forms of politics, and this precludes most kinds of movement politics. He seeks change mainly at a subjective, personal level. On the whole, his approach is reformist and gradualist. He believes that changes happen through small reinflections of existing, dominant texts. A thoroughgoing pragmatism undermines any consistency his political positions may seem to have. Yet he also presents himself as radical, and he uses highly antagonistic forms of discourse on some occasions. He maintains the possibility of fundamental social change in a state of "now you see it, now you don't". He seems to maintain such a possibility as a never-reachable "horizon" which must always remain unachieved, or "to come". This follows logically from his ontology, but it limits his political usefulness in achieving substantive, worldly change.

Readers will already have gathered from the previous chapters that I have doubts about Bhabha's approach to politics. But, it should also be noted that I'm not exclusively

sceptical. I'm critical of Bhabha's overall model, because I believe autonomy is important. People are not necessarily co-constituted. Resistance does not *always* take the form of negotiation within existing structures. However, this is not to say that it *never* takes this form. There are situations where the creation of third options or inbetween zones is radical and transformative.

The first of these is a situation where someone's desire cannot be expressed in an existing binary. For example, a strong gender binary insists that people be either male or female, and that they form relationships with people of the opposite gender (known as heteronormativity). Opening up this binary allows people to be gay, bisexual, transgender, and so on. If a racial boundary is very rigid, then people might not be allowed to have sex or even to be friends across the boundary. Again, subverting the binary opens up possibilities. It's possible to think of a lot of examples, some of them more mundane. For example, a writer or artist might find it easier to express themselves by doing something which combines elements of two genres, or two art-forms. An explanation using two or more theories, or different academic disciplines, might be better than an explanation using only one. It might be easier to think about certain things if one assumes that a number of different viewpoints about them are each partially valid. The 'event-level' of reality is diverse. It is always bigger than the categories used to conceptualise it. Trying to force everything into categories all of the time can be repressive of the flows and forces themselves. This means the strategies Bhabha proposes are not *always* oppressive or counterproductive. There will be times when they really *do* help "newness enter the world".

A second situation where Bhabha's analysis works well is a situation where artificial binaries create unproductive polarisations. These binaries might create avoidable suffering. Or they might distract from the real source of social problems. For example, the creation of spaces of dialogue, outside of the separated logic of contending camps, can be part of conflict transformation (Lederach, 2005). And when indigenous groups resolve a feud,

they often establish measures, such as intermarriage or symbolic exchange, which reduce the separation of the formerly feuding groups. In the sociology of deviance, it is easier to engage with social problems from an anti-authoritarian perspective if it isn't assumed that people can be divided into 'criminals' and 'victims'. People might just have different needs or desires (say, for peace and quiet or for late-night parties), which can be met more easily if binary oppositions are avoided. In other cases, polarised intergroup divisions (for example, between different ethnic groups in some African countries) undermine struggles against the dominant structure of oppression. For instance, ethnicity in Nigeria often functions in terms of competition for the spoils of transnational oil exploitation by different patronage networks (Zalik, 2004; Ikelegbe, 2006). This interferes with the struggle against neocolonialism, dependency, and capitalist extractivism which emerges at moments of inter-ethnic protest (Olayode, 2018).

A third situation where Bhabha's approach might be appropriate is when a false binary is used to conceal a more basic antagonism. If there is a binary between A and B, and both A and B are part of the system, then the binary itself is also part of the system. A hybrid or binary-rejecting stance would then be necessary to take an anti-systemic stance. Taking a stance for A or B reinforces the system. People fight amongst themselves, around social binaries, instead of fighting the source of their problems. Situationists claim that this kind of false binary is central to how the system (which they call the 'Spectacle') works. The Spectacle offers a series of false choices, each of which is also a way of affirming the system. For example, people can buy Pepsi or Coke, vote Democrat or Republican, and take supporting or opposing positions on all kinds of single issues. While some of these choices are more 'real' than others, they all serve to avoid the real choice: between the

Spectacle and disalienated life. By accepting either of the choices within the false binary, one effectively chooses the Spectacle.

Bhabha cannot use this argument because he does not want to think in terms of a real antagonism overwritten by the others. For Bhabha, in effect, all binaries are false binaries. Even the binary between radical opposition and the system is also a binary inside the system. However, this implies that everything is language, or at least has the structure of language. Sometimes, conceptual binaries express antagonisms which also exist in the outer world, and are not simply effects of language. The situationist signifier "life" is not simply a signifier in language. It opens onto a sphere of non-linguistic experiences which cannot be expressed in language. In this sense, it escapes the binary structure of language.

A fourth situation where inbetween zones can have transformative effects is the mass-mobilisation space, such as Tahrir Square, Tiananmen Square or the Greek Revolt of 2008. Such spaces have been analysed as spaces of 'whatever-singularity' (Agamben, 1993), where separation and therefore sovereign power break down. Participants refer to their positionalities and differences seeming less important during these moments. The Greek revolt involved students, anarchists, homeless people, unemployed people, and immigrants, but they did not feel like they were participating as separate groups. They were part of one big movement, acting together. In Tahrir Square, photos were circulated showing Coptic Christians protecting Muslims while they prayed. There is normally a great deal of antagonism between Coptic Christians and the Muslim conservatives and radicals who were also present at Tahrir Square. Such experiences of the breakdown of social distinctions and oppositions are common to liminal experiences (see above, 313-20). They occur because of the nature of the social group as a 'fused group' (Sartre, 1976), in which participants are integrated in a common practice or a common object of action, rather than through organisational structures. The source of unity in such a case is affective, rather than linguistic. I would argue that inbetweenness is here transformative because it replaces abstract, representational categories with concrete connections.

A fifth case where Bhabha's strategies might work, as discussed above (Chapter 8), is the strategic use of 'negotiation' to ward off power. This is possible when there are different hidden and public transcripts. The hidden transcript is very dangerous to express in public, because of the power of a dominant group. As a result, the people using a hidden transcript put up a performance of conforming to the public transcript. But they alter the public transcript in subtle ways, bringing it as close to the hidden transcript as they dare.

Another kind of strategic use of inbetweenness is the use of carnivalesque. For example, some protesters in the anti-capitalist movement sometimes dress as clowns, carry giant puppets, and act in quite unpredictable ways. People might dust down police shields with a feather duster, fire harmless items from a catapult, or imitate cheerleaders. This style of protest often raises the morale of other protesters, and confuses police. Carnivalesque protest tactics are sometimes very effective. For example, at the Prague protests against the IMF, the police seemed happier dealing with militant protesters than with clowns. They didn't know what to do when clowns approached the police line and started interacting with them in playful ways. The resultant confusion allowed protesters to break through the police lines (Juris, 2008). Mimicry for purposes of parody is also common in social movements. Examples include the Yes Men (Hynes and Fagan, 2007) and the Billion Billionaires marches (Haugerud, 2013).

Finally, experiences of altered consciousness – such as meditation, drug use, and psychosis – can lead to an experience of reality as a continuum. In such cases, the appearance of distinct categories sometimes breaks down. This can lead to transformative politics, as people come to reject the world of the Spectacle as false. This is central, for instance, in the political theory of Hakim Bey (1985, 1994, 1996). For Bey, altered consciousness gets us back to the level of creative chaos from which all reality ultimately comes. It shows us that the system's reality is just a kind of negative trance. And it provides the space in which we can choose our own meanings and values, and become autonomous.

Bhabha and the Politics of the Third Way

Overall, however, my view of Bhabha is critical. As discussed above (Chapter 11), one problem with Bhabha's theory is the displacement of politics into culture. Bhabha sees all discourse as political. He attaches particular importance to cultural interventions. Rather than opening other discursive spaces to politics, this tends to operate as a substitute for concrete politics. If analyses of artworks and interventions in academic debates are themselves seen as political, a theorist can claim to be politically active and radical while remaining well removed from movement and institutional politics. This can have negative effects on both sides. On the cultural side, the political "stakes" in representation legitimise censorship and political interference. They corrode the autonomy of the cultural field and undermine other kinds of aesthetic and subcultural criteria. On the political side, the focus on representation leads to a type of politics which puts style over substance.

This process should not be viewed separately from its historical context. A particularly important aspect of Bhabha's immediate environment was the conversion of the Labour Party from a somewhat democratic mass party with a vibrant left-wing, into a media machine based on the authoritarian power of PR-trained leaders and officials. The conversion of mass parties into media or regime parties is a worldwide trend, and corresponds to de-democratisation and the entrenchment of neoliberalism (c.f. Robinson, 1996; Mkandawire, 1999). In the Labour Party, this trend led during the 2000s to purges of radicals, the continuation of neoliberal policies, extreme social authoritarian measures such as Asbo's, Islamophobia, and the Iraq war. The reactionary nature of Third Way politics was partially managed through the 'inclusion and diversity' agenda. This whitewashing initiative combined tokenism in political representation with the creation of carefully-policed academic and NGO patronage machines.

Of course, Bhabha does not argue directly for any of the reactionary aspects of the Third Way. Most of the Third Way's worst excesses clearly rest on strong exclusionary binaries. But, heeding his own call to assess political positions in context and not on principle, his positions are at the very least contextually unhelpful. He failed to recognise the mediatised and de-democratising context of Labour's reorientation. This failure stemmed from his dismissal of concrete politics and idealisation of the impact of high art. And his mistaken assessment of 1980s-90s politics was arguably the basis for his confusion of systemic incorporation with anti-essentialist inclusion. In engaging mainly in cultural politics, he lacks a political instinct for the concrete context, and is easily fooled by wily political actors with a knack for representation.

Laclauian hegemonic politics, which Bhabha largely embraces, often has dangerous effects. It depends on the integration of diverse subject-positions through political antagonisms and empty signifiers. It thus requires a degree of social authoritarianism so as to prevent the "floating" subject-positions from drifting away. Bhabha calls for a hegemonic elite to produce 'politicised populations' as a means to radical change (LC, 29). A politicised population is one which does not precede its political articulation. It is reconstituted through political acts or speech. In other words, the political elite is urged to take on a far more central role in the formation of social discourse than has historically been the case in countries like Britain.

Bhabha got what he wanted, in a distorted form he would never have predicted. In practice, the politics of fear, such as the mobilisation of 9/11 as an ecstatic media event (Chouliaraki, 2006), is a concrete example of a hegemonic elite producing 'politicised populations' as its social basis. The social demand for security is as much a product of securitisation as a prior demand it represents. However, there is nothing progressive in such processes of political manipulation. Bhabha has also contributed, by extension, to the *denkverbot* or prohibition on thinking with regard to radical positions. This creates a supportive context for the neo-McCarthyism of 'counter-extremism'. This is the case, not so much because Bhabha opposes revolutionary positions, as because he dismisses them in a language which seems designed to cut off debate and silence opponents. His own politics of perversion fuels the bigger politics of perversion of the Third Way.

Bhabha's account reflects changes in neoliberal society. Initially he is responding to the trends towards non-traditional, identity-based and single-issue politics in the 1980s-90s. The big electoral coalitions of social-democrats and conservatives were fraying, and people were either voting for new parties (such as Greens, right-wing populists, and local nationalists), or using direct action outside established political channels. This led to a perception that new subcultures and social movements were increasingly uninterested in naturalised, permanent, or traditional values or politics (Huddart, 2006:70). Part of this process involved the splintering of migrants, local sub-nations, and racial and cultural minorities from larger electoral blocs.

However, this process has now gone even further. The tendency to fragmentation has been reinforced by social media. Current, younger political activists are less likely to have fixed party loyalties than older generations. Instead, they articulate their private identity and their politics through social media. They adopt causes and ideologies as and when particular issues resonate for them, rather than applying them consistently (Mahlouly, 2013; Papacharissi, 2010; Wellman et al., 2003). Advocates see this process as self-empowering, freeing people from the control of overarching political communities. Critics see it as a market-like, consumerist approach to politics which impedes critical thought and long-term political effectiveness (Bauman, 2000). It works well for identity-based positionality politics similar to Bhabha's. But it also works well for the far right, charismatic left-wing leaders, and sectarian 'groupthink' in general.

The emphasis on partial articulations and identities formed through their political representation also reflects a failure to engage with neoliberalism and persistent structural power. Today, systemic power does not necessarily operate through the imposition of explicit binaries. It also involves the concealment of a particular metanarrative, or general ideological position, behind an appearance of inclusion. Neoliberalism is *in fact* a metanarrative, based on the reduction of all of social life to commodified values and

cybernetic systems. But it does not articulate this structure on the surface of its discourse. It conceals its metanarrative as a set of descriptive claims about reality. In Bhabha's work, there is a similar process of concealment of metanarratives. As we have seen (81-5, 251-8, 264-8), the concealed 'trunk' or hegemonic position is the poststructuralist 'language model'. In neoliberal politics, the concealed 'trunk' is capitalism. Third Way parties can build electoral coalitions of diverse groups, but their basic driving force is the embrace of the neoliberal 'knowledge' or 'service' economy. They reject redistributive policies, introduce market dynamics into public-sector institutions, and use repressive laws to create conditions to attract transnational investment. The illusion that these contingent policies are simply responses to changed 'times', to globalisation or modernisation, is central to their political legitimation. Theories like Bhabha's have sometimes contributed to a folding-in of reality on the system. By focusing on everyday, microsocial spaces, poststructuralists often neglect the functioning of large, systemic logics. This is helpful for the system, because neoliberalism more generally tries to conceal the possibility of alternatives at a systemic level, and the operation of its own logic. The hybridity one occupies as an unhomely world is neoliberalism. Bhabha counsels us to occupy and sublimate and survive within it, rather than fighting it. A migrant who lives in this world is for Bhabha ethically superior to those (subaltern as well as privileged) who fight to keep their “homely” territories.

The strange complicities between Bhabha's politics and those of the Third Way suggests limits to his theory of power – and by extension, those of poststructuralist/identity approaches more broadly. Bhabha conceives power as mainly colonial, mainly linguistic, and operating mainly through privileged people's egos. But ultimately, neoliberalism does not feel itself particularly threatened by performances like Bhabha's. Indeed, the government seems to prefer this style of critique to approaches such as Marxism. This is clear in the way "inclusion and diversity" patronage went to poststructuralists instead of Marxists in the 1980s-90s. Poststructuralists remain marginal compared to neoclassical economists and natural scientists. Yet they are clearly not seen as threatening in the same way that more overtly radical positions are.

This suggests that Bhabha's challenge to colonialism does not (as he imagines) subvert it at its root level. Ultimately, capitalism can do without the 'modern subject' and 'western reason', and make do with partial, pragmatic knowledges and PR strategies – provided the money system and the Spectacle remain intact. As long as enough people keep having to work for a wage, and production for profit is privileged over ecology and social need, capitalism can tolerate whatever cultural transgressions it has to. It doesn't care how Arabs interpret *Dallas*, as long as the big media corporations keep receiving the broadcast fees. It can deal perfectly well with hybridity, which might even underpin comparative advantages (see Wolpe, 1972), or open up new markets and new fractions of capital. The system can also handle hybridity by simply multiplying new categories. And it might even be able to survive a transfer of global power from America and Europe to East Asia. (Theories like Bhabha's might actually help pave the way for a global neo-Confucianism if this happens). A critique which occupies the fissures, without overcoming the ideology they subvert, actually keeps the dominant ideology intact, even in the face of its own collapse. Capitalism can handle and recuperate such partial subversions. What it cannot handle is a world without value, a rejection of the integrating force of the regime of value and equivalence. It cannot handle life lived directly.

Bhabha and Contemporary Politics

Overall, I think Bhabha's approach is unhelpful more often than it is helpful. I have discussed various problems with particular aspects of Bhabha's theory at different points in this book. Now, it is time to look at the bigger picture. The Lacanian/Derridean approach has been influential – in political theory as well as discourse analysis and cultural studies – for more than thirty years now. Yet it is no closer to articulating a political alternative or a vision of how its doctrine could be socially generalised, than it was at the beginning. Its advocates constantly criticise both the status quo and available political alternatives, but with only the most abstract proposals of their own. Most often, they make quasi-moral exhortations to their readers to think and react in a more poststructuralist way – offering up "feeling rules" for their readers as to which emotions are desirable or undesirable (see above, 382-7). Yet these exhortations are imprecisely formulated and rarely reach outside academia. People are exhorted to be more responsible, though the meaning of this signifier is vague. People are told to accept uncertainty and anxiety, although it is never clear how. We are told that there needs to be an open-ended dialogue, but minus any voices too hostile to poststructuralist root assumptions, and with no resolution. It is unclear who will create the spaces for this dialogue, or what people should do if the global or national elite refuse to allow it. People are meant to develop their critical literacy and their ability to work in translational ways, yet the very form of Bhabha's theory precludes any transmission from a cultural elite to the wider population. People should reject liberalism, capitalism, and the modern subject, yet they must not do anything to separate from these concepts or the institutions they ground, or to bring them down.

No wonder, then, that there is no groundswell of movements echoing or applying the Lacanian/Derridean agenda, or even so much as a groupuscle. This model of theory seems designed for sniping from the sidelines, denouncing the sins of the entire world without lifting a finger against it. In contrast, then, to Marxism, anarchism, liberalism, anti-colonialism, and many other theories, postcolonial theory has generated no real political movements. There is no postcolonial-mimicry affinity group; there is no Postcolonial Workers' Party (Bhabhaist-Spivakist) with dozens of splinters.

What *has* appeared, however, is a new type of militant identity politics. Tracing its roots to the liberation movements of the 1970s, it lacks the Marxist-inspired structural analysis and revolutionary politics which often characterised these movements. Often declaring itself 'intersectional' (i.e. interested in several different oppressions), such politics has proliferated on social media and in the remnants of autonomous social movements in countries like America, Canada, Australia and the UK. Rejecting general critiques of capitalism and the state, this approach echoes Bhabha's calls for a focus on centring marginalised positionalities. However, it does so in an 'enraged' rather than a melancholic way. The melancholic and pessimistic affects advocates by Bhabha are reserved almost entirely for 'privileged' subjects. Bhabha would doubtless repeat his critiques of Fanon and Ignatiev in relation to many of the proponents of this type of politics.

This caveat aside, contemporary identity politics reproduces most of the ideas discussed in this book: strong constructivism, co-constitutivity, the automatic success of interpellation, the primacy of positionality, a right to narrate backed by a duty to shut up and listen, a celebration of discomfort and disjuncture, a position of subverting neoliberalism from the inside, a focus on culture and representation, and so on. This movement has engaged in confrontational politics, both progressive (such as fighting fascists, resisting immigration raids, and protesting against killings by police) and not so progressive (such as aggressively disrupting left-wing and anarchist events, and running 'no platform' campaigns against radicals deemed to have violated anti-oppressive etiquette in relatively small ways). In the strengths and weaknesses of this movement, the effects of Bhabha's philosophy become clear. The weaknesses in particular have been central to much of the preceding critique. In practice, this style of politics becomes far more zero-sum and uncompromising than Bhabha would like. The zero-sum nature of such politics makes sense if people are viewed as co-constituted – if, say, black people can *only* be free from racism if white people are transformed in their very identity and psychological structure. It has the same source as Bhabha's own ambivalence about antagonism.

The Derridean idea of the supplement (see above, 357-364), which is the basis for Bhabha's theory of inbetweenness, also leads to the idea that control over writing (including the entire production of social 'texts') is politically vital. The closest we can get to liberation is an endless free production of texts which constantly causes meanings to shift. Authoritarian and oppressive politics necessarily involves control over writing and the fixing of meanings. Anti-oppressive politics involves resistance to such control. Hence, questions such as whose voice is 'centred', whether people assume a certain kind of 'subject' or identity, and whether certain claims are taken for granted become politically central. This is a project of social change, because it is hoped that the disruption of textual fixity will destroy the basis for social hierarchy. The word 'decentring' also comes from Derrida. In his work, to 'decentre' something is to show how it depends on its supplement or extimate other. The Derridean idea that language is violence is clearly

implicated in the focus on linguistic "microaggressions". And the idea of constant slippage of signifiers can be used to authorise wilful misreadings of opponents. Derrida's influence, mediated by postcolonial, feminist, and Queer Theory authors, is widespread, though often unacknowledged, today. However, it is often hard to tell if particular authors are using a specifically Derridean idea of decentring or a more general idea of dispersal/diffusion of power or decentralisation.

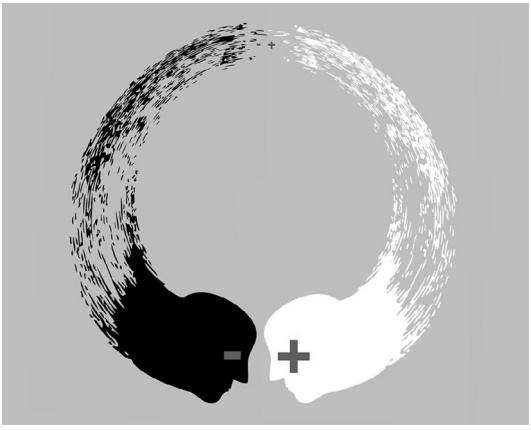
Logically, Derrida's approach would also seem to require the rejection of all fixed categories – including those directed against abuse, violence, and so on – and openness to all changes and slippages, even those which lead to personal death or human extinction. The endless shapeshifting this theory demands may be beyond the capabilities of human organisms. All of these effects are justifiable to adherents of deconstruction, who believe that the subversion of binaries and illusions of self-presence is the only way to destroy social oppression. But this depends on the truth of the Derridean point of view – a truth which it has to posit, but which goes against its truth-disruptive project. Paradoxically, Derridean politics leads to a polarising logic in which the binary between binarisers and non-binarisers creates a strong performative contradiction. In practice, the more drastic implications of deconstruction are usually toned-down. The fusion of deconstruction with identity politics limits its application to 'privileged' positions. This is theoretically inconsistent, but more politically sustainable than consistent deconstructionism. The belief that nothing has an inherent meaning encourages the idea that it is possible to spin off any reading one wishes from any particular text. One's own reading becomes immune from critique. However, this is a dangerous game, as the same capability is available to adversaries. To avoid the collapse of one's own commitments in absolute relativism, discursive trickery is needed to exempt oneself from one's own corrosive power.

The process of deconstructing naturalised identities is primarily a process of self-change, and thus fits in well with the therapeutic culture of neoliberalism. It also fits in with the external, relational, behaviourist focus of capitalist cybernetics. In particular, for deconstructionists, people are meant to give up their need or desire for predictability, control, and meaning, and allow themselves to be redefined from the outside, from others' points of view. The slippage and deferral of signifiers, the logic of the supplement, always happens. But it matters whether people accept and go along with it (and maybe even accelerate it), or whether they instead deny, disavow, and try to suppress it. The attempt to suppress the slippage of signifiers is for Derrideans the root of oppression. The Derridean idea of endless deferral is derived from, but subtly differs from, the Lacanian process of 'traversing the fantasy'. The Lacanian process entails accepting constitutive lack, and rejecting the illusion that suffering is caused by the loss or absence of a particular object of desire. It requires passing through 'subjective destitution' – the destruction, symbolic death, or utter degradation of the existing self. Both of these ideas influence Bhabha, and also influence contemporary identity politics. *We can't have nice things because suffering is essential to the human condition.*

One of the problems which comes out in practice is that postcolonial politics is not particularly inclusive towards difference, broadly defined. It relies on a definition of difference which is restricted to co-constituted, extimate self-other relations. Is therefore, by extension, excludes anyone whose difference falls outside such structures. Assuming

co-constitutivity of identities is dangerous. It harms intergroup relations in cases where there isn't co-constitutivity. It reduces the sense of others as unique, and not as one's own projections or introjections. Awareness of others as separate people is undermined. Each concrete "other" is identified with the internal other, and the traits of this idealised other are projected onto them. On the other hand, each concrete "self" also considers itself identical to the "other" it is for others, so that its own suffering is an effect of their projections. This leads to a flattened social field which ignores inner, personal, unconscious factors. By implying that one already knows what the 'other' is and what they need to do, one closes off any possibility for seeing their actual otherness.

As we have seen, Bhabha believes strongly in self-other co-constitution. This is central to his theory of positionality (see above, 139-50). This has particular political consequences. Assuming co-constitutivity of identities is arguably dangerous. It harms intergroup relations in cases where there isn't co-constitutivity. It reduces awareness of others as unique, and not as one's own projections or introjections. Hence, it leads to a view that one's own projections and introjections are accurate. If one perceives others in a certain way, this is actually what they *are*. If one is a subaltern subject, one's perceptions actually reflect the other's disavowed internal other. One does not have to make allowances for the fact that others might not really be the way one sees them. In Bhabha, these beliefs express themselves in an imperative, moralising tone. Readers are *commanded* to agree with him, on pain of being declared racist otherwise. Entire lines of theorising, such as the idea of racism as regressive (LC, 248-50), are ruled out morally, on principle. Yet the moral imperatives Bhabha invokes lose their force without the empirical assumptions on which they are based. Bhabha *assumes* opposing positions have reactionary effects; he does not *show* that they do. Yet his assumption is expressed in a kind of imperative discursive coercion directed towards the reader. This style of arguing, sometimes termed "moral hustling" in political discourse, closes space for dialogue.



The Derridean idea of the supplement was discussed above (357-364). According to this theory, any self-present identity is founded on an exclusion of an abject other. This is known in Derridean terms as 'privilege'. For the abject term to be released from its authoritarian subordination, the primary term needs to be disrupted. This is meant to culminate in the collapse of the egos of people who identify with the primary term. This theoretical orientation probably influences the current propensity among poststructuralist-inspired identity activists to tear down the egos of ostensibly privileged people, usually with total disregard for the suffering which results. From a perspective like Bhabha's, such destruction is a necessary part of the therapeutic self-change of privileged people. This self-change is in turn a necessary prerequisite for destroying social inequalities. Social movements adopting such a perspective often involve an antagonistic, binarising, and polarising style which Bhabha would object to (see above, 212-19, 861-882, 885-8). However, Bhabha's work also involves such binarising gestures (see above, 251-8, 264-8, 274-6). It is possible that the 'return' of binary logics is built into the Derridean strategy, because it relies so heavily on the binaries it subverts. It is also possible that the failure of personally-performed cultural subversions to eliminate structural hierarchies, which might seem to suggest that the deconstructive perspective is simply wrong, has instead led to increasing frustration with the resistance of "privileged" subjects to the intended effects of such gestures.

The etiquette-laden politics of much of the left today is partly an effect of the belief in co-constitution. If people are co-constituted, it's necessary to demand that some (selves) change so that others (the Other) can be free. The idea that each can have rights or be free in their own self-development becomes anathema. Instead, one person's feelings of exclusion, silence, shame and so on are attributed to others' feelings of confidence, pride or voice. The 'privileged' other has to be torn down so that the 'oppressed' self can be raised up. This leads to a resentful kind of politics. As a political strategy, this approach seeks to cause 'discomfort' and 'disjuncture' for other people so as to boost one's own ego, and also in the hope that it will serve as a path to liberation. The idea that each can have rights or be free in their own self-development becomes anathema. It is dismissed as "liberal" or "narcissistic". This *denkverbot* on individualism undermines autonomous politics based on desire and affinity.

What is more, this style of politics often involves swingeing demands to refrain from doing anything which might be felt by someone else to silence or 'speak over' them, to 'take up too much space', to cause others shame, distress or embarrassment, or to suggest unconscious prejudice against their group – even unintentionally. These demands stem logically from the 'right to narrate' (see above, 947-61). One problem with this is that different people (even in the same group as defined by positionality) are differently affected by different things, and the intent behind a statement or action may be very different from how it is perceived. Also, an inadvertently distressing effect does not necessarily involve an unconscious intent. People might just be coming from contingently very different, non-co-constituted points of view. Dialogue and tolerance are often needed. For someone using a postcolonial perspective, unconscious structural causes can be read off all too easily from subjective effects. If people are co-constituted, it's fine to assume that every effect – say, an instance of distress or of "feeling silenced" - is somehow structurally intended, even if it's unconscious. It's fair to make swingeing demands on others to show consideration for one's internal mental states, which should

be comprehensible to them because of co-constitution, and to interpret any resistance to this demand as a reactionary ego-defence. People can thus demand more pre-emptive consideration than is possible from others. These kinds of voice-related claims have largely replaced "objective" reality-claims in the cybernetic era. The loss of criteria of truth, objectivity and meaning has not led to a loss of authority. Rather, authority is displaced to the question of "who benefits" - who is enabled and subverted by each framing or claim. Framings which might encourage oppression are suppressed without dialogue.

One problem with this style of politics is that different people (even in the same positionality) are subjectively, emotionally affected by different things, and the intent behind a statement or action may be very different from how it is perceived. An inadvertently distressing effect does not necessarily involve an unconscious intent. People might just be coming from contingently very different, non-co-constituted points of view. Dialogue and tolerance are needed. From a postcolonial perspective, unconscious structural causes can be read off all too easily from subjective effects. If people are co-constituted, it's fine to assume that every effect – say, an instance of distress or of "feeling silenced" - is somehow structurally intended, even if it's unconscious. One person's negative state is the disavowed other of someone else's positive state. It's fair to make swingeing demands on others to show consideration for one's internal mental states, which should be comprehensible to them because of co-constitution.

People can thus demand more pre-emptive consideration than is realistically possible from others. Intrusive demands are made on the soul, the very being, of the 'privileged' subject (including other subaltern people deemed 'privileged' in a particular way). This displaces change from social structures to personal psychology, just like in neoliberal approaches (see Smail, 1993; Fisher, 2009; Sometimes Explode, 2014). People are assumed to always be engaged in metaphorical, intimate power-games of the kind viewed as basic by Bhabha (see above, 82-3, 98-9). This often makes discourse excessively personal and smothering. Even if it is true that people seek this kind of intimate exchange with others, they do not seek it with anyone and everyone, all of the time. Constant demands for this kind of over-present, intimate exchange are disruptive of other kinds of connections. Such demands are (to use today's rhetoric) a kind of boundary-violation. They establish an intimate connection without consent, on the basis of a false claim that it already exists, or that they know in advance that it is wanted by the other person. This understandably activates others' danger-sense. Even people who are open to excavating repressed material or unconscious motives are unlikely to do so in unsafe contexts such as social media call-outs. There is also the problem of whether unconscious projections and fantasies *can* be excavated in these kinds of superficial, non-depth settings. Psychoanalytic literature suggests that it takes time, and an appropriate context, to work through unconscious material. It is not simplistically brought to light because someone "calls it out", or when someone reads a novel which points towards it. It is simply not possible to achieve psychoanalytic effects using cybernetic, behaviourist methods. The unconscious is not a feedback loop.

People using Bhabha's type of theory also tend to make swingeing use of psychological signifiers in a non-clinical context, often based on superficial acquaintance with another person's discourse. This is again continuous with Bhabha's rhetoric. And it leads to the same problems. Approaches appropriate in depth psychoanalysis can become abusive when used in superficial ways, and in everyday political contexts. It is one thing to

challenge people to "work through" their repressions, projections and foreclosures in a clinical setting, another thing entirely to try to force them to do so using art, theory, or politics. It is not just the consent and safety of the clinical setting which are lost in the process. All the case-specific, ideographic depth of a psychoanalytic treatment is also lost. Unconscious motives which it would take months to excavate in analysis are simply asserted and condemned on tentative evidence. No distinction is made between a person's projected or introjected internal others and the actual outer person they are interacting with. The result is that the 'oppressed' person's fantasies and projections are given free rein, and others, labelled as 'privileged', become invisible except as projections. From a political point of view, there is a relationship between co-constitutivity and the forms taken by identity-based activism today. The emphasis on co-constitutivity leads to demands for 'safety' (at the expense of openness), 'humility' (or submission), and 'recognition of privilege' (rather than resonance based on affinity). These forceful, authoritative demands are destructive of the very possibility of anti-authoritarian politics.

For example, an argument is made against free speech on the basis that language directly harms people. Language orders and creates reality, and even people's subjectivities. Particular labels and ideas take away others' ability to create their own identity, and impose a harmful identity on them. This leads directly to violence. The aim of poststructuralist-

identity activism, therefore, is to create a context where the ruling oppressive ideology can't carry on its conversations, and marginalised people are instead empowered to have their own conversations and their own agency of self-creation. This requires 'safe spaces' where people are free from dominant, normalising discourses. This argument is increasingly extended beyond attempts to silence outright racists, to include intolerance of critics and even other radicals. It generates a kind of fraternity-terror (Sartre, 1976) amongst radicals themselves. In other words, people are constantly afraid of being attacked or "called-out" by their political comrades. And this, in turn, prevents contentious claims from being examined. Opponents of the inhibitionist, censorious tendencies arising from such fraternity-terror are routinely dismissed as racists and sexists acting in bad faith. They are subject to the very procedures they try to question.

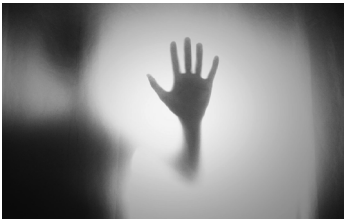
The entire structure of such a political strategy depends on the social ontology discussed above (Chapters 2-3). For instance, the argument against free speech requires the strong constructivist view that the social world is an effect of language, so that ascribed categories actually become real categories which actually determine people's real subjectivities. Poststructuralist-identity activism also involves a model of language in which there is always antagonism as to who gets to speak and who gets classified by others – a context of scarcity of validation, attention and "social capital". As we have seen (above, 274-6), these are also central aspects of Bhabha's theory. The argument for 'safe spaces' follows logically from assumptions such as Bhabha's, but it is often disastrous. It creates rigidly policed, unfree spaces in which 'privileged' people are silenced, and marginalised people are free to speak only to the extent that they reproduce a homogenised discourse. It also reinforces regimes of top-down power and restriction, which are necessarily used against marginalised people more often than they are against oppressors. And it undermines the possibility of self-expression and dialogue at a human level, as 'unique ones'. It prevents affinity-based politics.

As in Bhabha's theory of stereotypes, the resultant interpellations are often self-contradictory. 'Privileged' people are urged both to identify as a stereotypical racist white person, and to reject and dismantle this image. But the latter is also treated as impossible, or at least, a long-term goal. The assumption underlying this is that social categories provide a causal nexus for identity and 'behaviour'. If, on the other hand, people are unique individuals, and/or if desire comes from a different, molecular and expressive level, this approach is itself extremely oppressive. The interpellation of 'privileged' others by poststructuralist-inspired activists is itself a violence of the same kind as the interpellation of social outgroups. The insistence “you are X” or even “you are just an X” subordinates each person's uniqueness to abstract social categories, whether it's applied "upwards" or "downwards" in social hierarchies. The violence of this gesture is invisible to postcolonial theorists because the binary involved is assumed to be constitutive of, and prior to, identity. But what about the 'bad subjects' whose identities haven't 'installed' correctly? In these cases, "you are just an X" elides the gap which exists between the person's psyche and the social/symbolic order. It renders entire swathes of human life invisible and voiceless.

The outcome of this ethical position is strangely continuous with the emerging cybernetic society of control. Intrusive demands are made on the soul, the very being, of the 'privileged' subject. People are to change who they are, what they desire, in response to demands coming in from the outside. The demands and interpellations made by

poststructuralist-identity activism can be experienced as extremely intrusive. They are almost a kind of soul invasion, in which the other and their categories are suffocatingly over-present. Demands for change may take no account of a person's needs, capabilities, intent, or feelings. Their effectiveness relies mainly on moral mechanisms, backed by group sanctions. Rather than seeking disinhibition of the id, people seek social change through the superego. This displaces change from social structures to personal psychology, just like in neoliberal approaches.

This style of politics does not lead to communities of the oppressed, as Bhabha hopes. Instead, it tends to create conflicts between ingroups and outgroups based on group-based demands that one group give something up to benefit the other. This is experienced by ingroups as a group-based threat. It provokes defensive responses for this reason (Berman, 2018). This divisive effect makes political alliance-formation extremely difficult. The "ally" has to accept the entirety of an outgroup position and expect nothing in return. Positive-sum alliances, such as those arising in affinity-based politics and big-tent socialism, are ruled out. The zero-sum nature of identity-related conflicts makes sense if people are viewed as co-constituted – if, say, black people can *only* be free from racism if white people are transformed in their very identity and psychological structure.



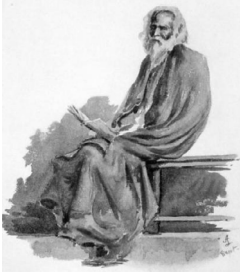
Intrusive etiquette demands are a crimp on the free becoming of each. Such an approach hurts the 'oppressed' as well as the 'privileged', in several ways. Firstly, it accords very different social rights and duties to people who can claim to be oppressed and those who cannot. This sets off constant competition over which oppressions 'count' – known as

'oppression Olympics'. This is disruptive of radical politics, and often very hurtful for the people involved. Secondly, this strategy chains the 'oppressed' person into a tight *che vuoi* exchange with their 'privileged' other, which prevents the development of *their own* desire away from an exclusive focus on this oppressive relationship. It prevents the emergence of autonomy, and transversal person-to-person connections, whether with 'oppressed' or 'privileged' people. The primary binary of privileged/oppressed or self/other gets in the way of horizontal connections. Thirdly, it does not bring into being a less hierarchical world. It keeps key aspects of social hierarchy intact, simply shifting the positions of different people within the hierarchy. It either keeps hierarchies intact by constantly reaffirming them, or it simply inverts them. Fourthly, it is generally unsuccessful. It is so demanding and intrusive, and so often experienced as bullying, that it causes people to burn out, or even pushes people on the receiving end towards prejudiced or polarised positions in retaliation (see Berman, 2018; Haider, 2017). Indeed, on a Derridean model, it is *bound* to fail, because it is impossible in principle to give due justice to the Other, and the 'to-come' never comes. This constitutive impossibility is often concealed behind claims that contemporary people simply can't imagine what a liberated world would look like.

Against this style of politics, an autonomous, rhizomatic approach is far preferable. From a Deleuzian point of view, everything begins as part of the holistic flow of becoming. However, each person or object is also "differenciated" - produced as something different. We each exist as part of the flow and as unique and "differenciated", prior to our classification in language. And we are cross-cut with non-linguistic flows which are also not structured like a language. Even language itself may not be structured the way

structuralists and cyberneticists think. A political approach which reduces unique people to categories – whether this political approach is racial segregation, Stalinist class politics, nationalism, or the postcolonial approach – is necessarily oppressive. It stamps on the difference of each person by treating them as a representative, or cipher, of a social category. On a Deleuzian view, exclusion and oppression do not result from self-other relations. They result from hierarchical power-structures in the outer world, which reduce people to particular categories. These issues of oppression are best resolved by fighting outer structures such as capitalism and the state, or by trying to find ways to arrange things so that everyone can coexist.

Bhabha and Spivak seek to seize the means of production of cultural value by changing the standpoint of enunciation. They effectively seek to seize the place of the dominant elite, empowering instead a postcolonial elite claiming to speak from a predefined "marginal" positionality (LC, 183, 242). This is similar to Stalinism, which seized the means of production from the bourgeoisie to put them in the hands of the Party. The means themselves are left intact. The new structure is as authoritarian as the old. And most of the formerly oppressed are still oppressed after their "liberation", along with the formerly privileged. A liberationist politics, on the contrary, seeks to *disperse* power and to *destroy* the existing means of production of cultural value. Creative flow and joyous living, not discomfort and lack, is its meaning-producing core. With each person's values defined based on their desires (see Bonanno, 1977; Bey, 1985; Passamani, n.d.), there will be neither an existing cultural hegemony, nor an alternative postcolonial elite, but an equalisation of power.



It has become common today to claim that knowledge itself is colonial. The 'knowing subject' (the person who thinks they know something) is co-constitutive with an 'other' constructed as ignorant and underdeveloped. Modern philosophy, science, social sciences, and humanities are tied-up in the project of 'modern reason', which is contaminated with colonial conquest from the start (see Chapter 2). This analysis accounts for the complicities which have often emerged between academic knowledge and colonial power. Examples include the role of economics in structural adjustment, the stereotypes of 'Orientalism', and the racist effects of risk-management. However, I believe this analysis casts the net too wide. Foucault's claim that 'power and knowledge directly imply one another' (1977:27) has been widely misunderstood. Power does not only mean domination, or 'power-over' – it can also mean empowerment, or 'power-to'. As Lazarus (2005) argues, there is no reason to assume that discursive power necessarily operates on a colonial model. Power can also exist as creative power, as co-operative power *with* others, and as bottom-up power to resist.

Hence, there is a need for more nuance in the critique of knowledge – nuance which Bhabha's verbose rhetoric resists. Certain kinds of top-down, reductive, subject-object knowledge involve dominatory power. Other forms of knowledge, such as those involved in the practice of crafts, are productive of other kinds of power. Some kinds of power are affirmative: the exercise of power is not a relationship of domination, but is mutually empowering. Other kinds of power are bottom-up or oppositional. They strengthen weaker actors and diffuse power-holders in resisting stronger actors, and they help to disperse power (c.f. Zibechi, 2010). I would here point to several examples.

Firstly, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) propose a model of 'nomad science' as an alternative to top-down 'royal science'. Nomad science is a type of immanent knowledge of processes and relations which is connected to dispersed practice. Secondly, James Scott (1998) writes of the everyday knowledge, or *métis*, held by peasants, workers and other 'subaltern' actors. Polanyi (1966) similarly talks about workers' 'tacit knowledge', and Foucault (1976) of the 'subjugated knowledges' of oppressed groups. This type of knowledge is connected to everyday practices, and intuitive and practical connections to a local lifeworld. There is also indigenous or local knowledge, which is formed in situated ways and sustains the 'power' to survive and flourish as a local culture. These kinds of knowledge are everyday, bottom-up, and often closer to what they claim to know than the top-down forms of knowledge. These various forms of knowledge create autonomous counter-powers, or dispersed forms of power, or else operate as power-equalisers against oppressors. In a Northern context, one might think about the knowledge needed to break a squat, plant an allotment, or encrypt emails as knowledges which sustain dispersed forms of power. The Trapese Collective handbook (2007) provides many concrete examples of bottom-up knowledges. There are also many cases where knowledge has undermined oppression – from the contributions of anthropology to undermining the naturalisation of gender norms, to scientific discoveries about climate change. The "knowing subject" is not in any consistent sense the enemy.

There are also forms of knowledge which can be to used create horizontal power, because they facilitate understanding, rather than top-down knowledge. According to Clifford Geertz for example, anthropology should aim for 'thick description'. It should seek to provide a sense of what words and practices mean for participants, culminating in intuitive 'understanding'. This kind of knowledge is more like 'getting' a joke than it is like memorising a fact (Geertz, 1973). It helps to create horizontal relationships in which communication can actually happen, and others' statements and actions can be "heard" and understood (enhancing their "right to narrate"). The resultant understanding helps to

create affinities, coexistence, and conflict transformation in concrete situations. Qualitative, interpretive knowledge helps people to understand how others think, feel and act. It helps to combat the stereotypes and preconceptions which often cause intolerance and conflict. This type of knowledge falls into Bhabha's category of 'diversity' rather than 'difference' (see Chapter 9). Yet it seems more useful in its social effects that Bhabha's type of 'difference'.

For example, someone who appreciates the qualitative sociology of "crime", the meanings of deviance for deviant actors, is unlikely to buy into simplistic anti-"crime" ideologies. Someone familiar with the ethnography of Islamic societies is unlikely to accept simplistic Islamophobic stereotypes. In principle, it is also possible for sinister actors (corporations, counterinsurgency agents and so on) to use qualitative knowledge to trick, manipulate and infiltrate the social groups they learn to 'understand' better. In practice, however, they prefer objectifying, top-down forms of knowledge. Ethnography aids intercultural understanding. Yet ethnographic knowledge is routinely attacked as colonial and oppressive today. Elite academics from marginalised groups would prefer to "speak as" members of their group (effectively on its behalf) than allow ethnographic understanding to develop. They seem almost afraid to lose the relationship of misunderstanding, the "lack", which sustains their own academic positions. It is as if they *need* "cultural difference" to be co-constitutive and unbridgeable.

As a final example, consider Korzybski's method of General Semantics (Korzybski, 1995/1933). Korzybski questions the simplifying assumptions of western reason (or what he calls 'Aristotelian' thought), but from a very different angle than Bhabha or Derrida. He focuses on the excess in the molecular world which exceeds and escapes from linguistic categories. He argues that the world is actually a series of unique, interconnected events at the quantum level. Humans are only able to perceive some of these, and only able to think about a subset of the ones we perceive. He suggests that concepts should be viewed as extensional sets – i.e. as series of distinct objects which are grouped together by a category. They are not emanations of the category and are not reducible to it. It is therefore important to always keep in mind the difference between the category and the real object or 'event', and the fact that the latter is always more than the former. In Korzybski's words, 'the map is not the territory'. This is very different from Bhabha's assumption that everything is constituted by categories – that the map *precedes* the territory!

In different ways, Deleuze and Guattari, Geertz and Korzybski represent alternatives both to the swingeing strong constructivism and belief in co-constitutivity adopted by the tradition to which Bhabha belongs, and of the reductive positivist approaches common in academia today. They point towards an empiricism without hubris, which allows us to make and falsify empirical claims without denying the possibility of multiple ways of seeing. They allow us to engage in dialogue across difference of a kind which truly relates to the non-co-constituted otherness of others, instead of interpellating them in a game of self/other co-constitution. It is in the relationship of beliefs to empirical reality – *including* the meanings, affects and beliefs of others – that dominatory knowledge is avoided.

The biggest limit of Bhabha's politics is that it does not even allow for the possibility of life lived directly. Since Bhabha denies that anything is outside representation, his preferred politics is also representational. He sees the most important struggles occurring *within* the field of representation, rather than against it. From a Deleuzian point of view, this entails Bhabha's submerging himself in the dominant system, suppressing its 'outside', and articulating politics which orient mainly to inclusion in the system. It entails neglect of the molecular level of affects and virtual forces. In plainer terms, it involves neglect of the everyday construction or expression of feelings, beliefs, attachments, experiences and ways of seeing. Yet this ignores the reality of radical politics. In experiences of fusion or interdependence in social movements, positionalities are often felt to dissolve (see above, 544-9). This shows that the system is not as total as Bhabha requires. His acceptance of its totalised nature in fact helps to reinforce the sense that there is "no alternative".

Another issue parallelling the problems in Bhabha's work is raised in Jeff Foster's (2010, 2014) videos on the topic of *advaita* (nondualism). *Advaita* is an important concept in Hindu and Buddhist thought. It involves a similar ontology to Bhabha's and Derrida's: reality is actually a holistic field, and the individual ego and individual objects do not exist. Human categories artificially create boundaries where in reality there are none. Neo-Advaita, the variant popular in the west, emphasises the nonexistence of the ego or self.

The main purpose of its practice is to give up attachments to the ego. Foster's videos show how nondualism can become puritanical and restrictive of thought and feeling, if it is used to deny all experiences and truth-claims. They show how the benefits of immediacy, free from ego-judgements, are undermined by the refusal of all the things and flows which would normally be treated as part of the outer world. Foster is himself a promoter of *advaita* or nondualism. The videos are meant to suggest that this kind of dour theoretical rejection of life is a misunderstanding of *advaita*. It turns *advaita* into a theory. *Advaita* cannot be a theory because it is not a mental experience to begin with. In the first video in particular, the cartoon character is using nondualism in a dualistic way. He is not recognising the tree as part of his extended self, and not showing compassion towards the other character.

Does this critique apply to Bhabha's thought? As we have seen (above, 7), Bhabha's approach is very different from common forms of *advaita*. However, a similar paradox emerges. He relies heavily on binary categories, antagonistic polemical language, and rhetorical tricks which create a reality-effect (see above, 20-1, 251-8, 264-8, 274-6). Hence, he does exactly what the cartoon character in Foster's video is doing. He performs nondualism dualistically, in a way which blocks subjective meaning and enjoyment. This suggests that his commitment to his own principles is incomplete. He remains forever inside the dualism he is trying to overcome, and indeed, often strengthens it through the force of his dogmatic insistence on ostensibly nondualist positions.

Exit Options

Further, Bhabha's preferences in terms of emotional responses empower the system. If antagonistic gestures are forbidden, the system's bargaining power is increased. The system can offer or demand incorporation on whatever terms it wishes. Someone adopting Bhabha's approach will always continue to comply, while subtly reinflecting what

is demanded. Yet the system not only has more social power than its adversaries – it also has an exit option. Bhabha believes everyone is co-constituted. The system requires its other. However, in practice, the system can simply delink from people or regions it dislikes. For instance, western transnational capital has withdrawn from much of Africa as simply unprofitable, focusing activity in a few extractive hubs which are cut off from the wider economy(Ferguson, 2005; Nederveen Pieterse, 2005; Trichur, 2003). Without a corresponding option of secession from the oppressed subject's side, the system has endless power to defeat reinflections by threatening to delink. And it can really delink, from individuals as well as societies, leading to what has been termed 'social triage' (Bey, n.d.). This alters the balance of power. As Tilly (1975) has observed, the exercise of voice within the system depends on the availability of exit from it. Today, we live in a world where the hegemon no longer feels that it needs collaborators and complicit locals. It demands unconditional capitulation (Bey, 1996). There is thus an urgent need to recreate exit options.

On the contrary, a discourse like Bhabha's keeps people clinging to a position of subversion-from-within as the opportunities for agency offered by inclusion approach zero. This allows the system to set unconditional demands which people are obliged to obey in order to stay 'hybrid' or 'marginal'. It encourages a condition of increasingly adverse incorporation, sustained by the self-help practice of the sublimation of suffering.

Yet this entire strategy rests on the vain hope that neoliberalism will never demand more than people – bolstered by sublimation – can provide. In many cases, the system already makes such impossible demands (Grahl, 2018). Capitalism will exert endless downward pressure on wages and social conditions unless it is counterbalanced by another social force. Without radical politics, people lack the bargaining power to achieve anything through negotiation on the inside. An unprincipled politics which refuses to refuse will thus be paralysed against the neoliberal project in all its decisive force.

The Language Model and Politics

Another problem is that the nature of language/discourse seems to be eternally fixed in Bhabha's worldview. If language is always a totalising structure, then transgressions cannot break it down entirely. Rather, it will necessarily re-form around changed categories, creating new fixed categories. We can see this in practice in the ways gender roles have hardened into new forms in neoliberalism, and post-colonial regimes have hardened into new forms of entrenched power. From Bhabha's point of view, such hardening seems unavoidable, and the transgression of dominant power seems to be a never-ending necessity. In other words, social transformation is an endless series of reforms which disrupt the system, but never bring it down. Bhabha would like to keep the space of transgression permanently open, without ever bringing down the system. Again, this is conservative in keeping the system intact, while also increasing suffering through the suspension of non-ironic attachment to it.

There is also the difficulty of explaining why social fixity and inertia sometimes triumphs. Bhabha assumes that the system is always contradictory and unstable. Its own identification, like any identity, is haunted by insoluble aporia. He calls for resistance from within, using internal contradictions to destabilise the system's binaries. This position renders the persistence stable power-structures almost inexplicable. And yet, both historical colonialism and today's neoliberalism have persisted for long periods without their contradictions leading to implosion. Tokugawa Japan managed to resist being colonised or modernised for centuries, apparently through sheer force of social conservatism. On similar lines, Rose's main criticism of Bhabha's work (which she generally admires) is its alleged optimism. She suggests that Bhabha maintains that the failure of power is *a priori* guaranteed. Power will always fail, because it is internally split, because of the nature of language and subjectivity. This downplays the importance of 'disruption' in bringing down a successful discourse. It implies that resistance is pointless, because power always breaks down. It therefore suggests a 'lack of interest in how powerful discourses remain powerful' (Rose, 1995:371). This is not quite what Bhabha has in mind, but it flags up an important problem in his theory.

That which subverts without overthrowing may subtly reinforce what it subverts. In a way, Bhabha's work actually entrenches the authority of academics. Bhabha theorises many things – from identity-formation to writing style – in a way which makes them necessarily *hard work*. The idea that theorising, reading, politics, life in general, is necessarily hard work, and something requiring a specialism which is necessarily conveyed by intellectual gatekeepers, is a problematic element in contemporary activism. Its effects tend to be silencing and disempowering. And it is often tied into the power-manoeuvres of people who can pose as the bearers of sophisticated analysis. On the other hand, effective movements are often those which are enjoyable and easy to be a part of (c.f. Landstreicher, 2005, 2014). The ideas that theory, politics, and social transformation are things that *anyone can do* – with or without a degree, and that they can be empowering,

relevant, and fun, are central to the appeal of horizontal and autonomous social movements.

Of course, challenging 'common sense' and opposing naïve, kneejerk approaches are also important aspects of radical politics. But the idea that politics is necessarily hard work – that we are always working on the edge of the unthinkable, transgressing our own identities, always outside our comfort zones – is a recipe for burnout and failure. Radical practice may initially be self-transformative and challenging, something which can also be felt as empowering rather than disjunctive. But it rapidly becomes an alternative way of life which feels more intense, more fulfilling, more 'natural' than the mainstream. It is not a state of being constantly uncomfortable and unable to express some unspeakable position beyond categorical thought. Rather, it is an experience of presence in a flow of becoming. The sublimation of suffering is a weak basis for transformative politics. It encourages affects which are politically debilitating.

I'm left with an overwhelming impression that Bhabha is naïve about how radical politics is actually done. He does not seem to have a sense of the problems and dangers involved, or the emotions which hold movements together. These emotions belong to the affirmative, empowering spectrum which Bhabha prohibits. In Peterson's (2001) study of radical activism, for example, radical social groups are not integrated by organisational forms or normativity, but by common or interrelated experiences of conflict with the system. This is very different from the emotional palette of melancholy (depression), humility, powerlessness, passivity and fluid adaptability which are the hallmarks of Bhabha's approach (see above, 331-46).

Radical movements often focus on autonomy. To be autonomous is to be self-determining, in that the sources of one's lived values are not derived from the dominant system. Yet this is not permitted by the rules of Bhabha's philosophy. The view of subjectivity as having a *che vuoi* structure, and the view of identities as necessarily interpenetrating, preclude autonomy in advance. Activism tends to sidestep the *che vuoi* structure of dominant subjectivities, by relating more through affect and action than through language. It refers back to what Deleuze and Guattari call the 'molecular' level, the level of direct connections which are not completely captured in language. However, Bhabha's strong constructivism prevents him from recognising the existence of any such level. It is true that the rejection of the system, and the creation of an outside, are both contingent and socially performed. It is through acts of opposition, exodus, resistance, and refusal that someone determines her/himself as an oppositional subject. Nevertheless, there is a big difference between constructing such a break on the basis of rejection of the dominant system, and taking contingent positions within a particular political field.

Political Possibilities Beyond Language

The political effects of the language model are conservative, because they limit the possible to the sayable. But often, the sayable is limited by the existing system. The theory of supplementation ignores the existence of forms of experience which are not

differentially structured and/or are not part of language. Bhabha uses phrases such as 'X is constituted as Y' in such a way as to identify words with the things they refer to. He thus writes as if real things can only exist because of their linguistic opposites or supplements. But this mixes up different kinds of co-constitution. It is true that a concept cannot exist without at least one other concept it is differentiated from. But it appears that things can empirically exist without their linguistically defined 'other' necessarily existing. It is possible to use binaries which refer to something which does not exist. For example, mortal beings can be contrasted with immortal beings, whether or not one believes that any immortal beings actually exist. As long as immortal beings can be thought about and spoken about in language, they can be used in a binary. Humans can be contrasted with demons, without requiring that demons exist, or that anyone believe demons to exist. One can similarly talk about dragons and dinosaurs, or dinosaurs and birds, or horses and unicorns. A binary can be "thinkable" and "sayable" without its terms having substantive social existence.

There is therefore an important distinction between the linguistic co-constitution of two *categories*, and the social co-constitution of two *things or processes*. The former does not require the latter. Politically, this distinction has significant consequences. Bhabha's approach is based on the assumption that things are effects of the words used to classify them in language (or at least, have the same differential structure as language). This assumption has conservative effects, because it means that currently existing binary oppositions cannot be overcome. There's no way out of capitalism, colonialism, the state, and so on.

Yet these conclusions are false. For example, stateless societies can exist in a world where there are no states. Deconstructive theorists argue as if stateless societies are impossible (see above, 683-690). But stateless societies can exist and have existed, and possibly still exist (see Robinson and Tormey, 2010; Barclay, 1982). Humans first evolved hundreds of thousands of years ago, but states are only about 6000 years old. Presumably people before 6000 years ago had no word for the state. But, it's possible that they had a word for

the state as an imaginary social form, the same way modern societies have words for unicorns and dragons. Future humans might also have no word for the state, if it does not exist any more. Or they might have the word, but use it only historically. Linguistically, anarchism and the state are co-constituted. The idea of anarchism or anarchy cannot exist without the idea of the state. But this doesn't mean that stateless societies can't exist without states. At most, the idea of "anarchism" would lose its meaning if no states exist, because it describes all the existing societies. The structure of language establishes nothing whatsoever regarding whether an anarchist society is possible or not.

It helps to think about the issue historically. One can easily imagine a deconstructionist writing before the French Revolution, arguing that monarchies cannot be eliminated. The people or the peasantry cannot exist without its linguistic 'other', the monarchy or the aristocracy. Trying to achieve 'democracy' is a hopeless utopia because the elimination of the 'other', the King, would also eliminate the 'people'. And they could even point to the previous failure of the English Revolution to confirm this! Yet the French Revolution happened, and self-styled 'democracies' without monarchs or aristocrats are now the normal political form. One might similarly discuss the eradication of smallpox, the extinction of dodos, the achievement of full employment, the disappearance of endangered languages, the abolition of slavery or of the death penalty, the collapse of Soviet communism (the necessary 'other' of American capitalism), or the extermination of the Taino people by colonisers. One could all too easily imagine a naïve Derridean arguing that such events are impossible, were they not observable facts.

This raises problems when deconstructionists and Lacanians argue in the same way that today's transformative visions are impossible – that stateless societies, autonomous social movements (Böhm et al., 2010), a classless society, workers' control, free networked activity, non-colonial societies, individual freedom, wilderness free from human control, true scientific knowledge, an end to poverty or homelessness, and so on, are utopias which are impossible because their achievement would destroy the supplement and therefore also the primary term. In each of these cases, the destruction of the supplement (destroying the adversary or overcoming the problem) destroys the binary as a set of empirically observable categories. But the destruction of the supplement, and therefore the outer reality of the oppositional binary, does not necessarily lead to the destruction of the "slice of reality" or the immanent force which is designated by the primary term. So for instance, an anarchist movement could no longer craft its own identity through moments of confrontation with the state, if the state no longer existed. But forms of immanent creativity based on free self-activity would still be possible, without an adversary to direct them against. A society could exist where everyone had homes, and therefore, the concept of 'homelessness' either did not exist or referred only to historical or fictional settings. This means that social problems are a lot more soluble – and antagonistic methods a lot less problematic – than deconstructionists like to assume. What if today it is also possible to move beyond modernity, not in an endless suspension which retains it, but in a move from imagined national-popular communities to small affinity groups or "neo-tribes"? What if this active *dismantling* of the world-system – and creation of something akin to the anarchist utopia *Bolo'Bolo* (PM, 1983) – is undermined by the academic focus on deconstructing yet retaining existing categories?

Bhabha, Derrida, and other such melancholic approaches are similar to Deleuzian and post-left approaches in rejecting master-signifiers and instead focusing on an open-ended network. They differ in their unremitting negativity and the affects they associate with the collapse of master-signifiers. There is no reason why living in an open network has to involve anxiety, scarcity, 'survival' rather than life, endless negotiation, non-resolution, and so on. A work like *Bolo'Bolo* (PM, 1983) reveals an affirmative, empowering vision of an open network. This type of network generates affirmative, empowering affects because it opens up possibilities for pursuing – and sometimes realising – many different desires and meaningful life-projects. Indeed, the collapse of master-signifiers, the release from command and renunciation, is a powerful affirmative appeal of autonomous politics. Yet Bhabha associates networks exclusively with negativity. The network assumption only leads to Bhabhaesque pessimism when it is combined with the smotheringly over-close ontology of co-constitution and the language model. Via this negativity and refusal of the possibility of successful realisation (often framed as 'teleology'), Bhabha reinjects master-signifiers which guarantee guilt and frustration. And ultimately, this allows Bhabha to stop short of following through on the overcoming of hierarchies by networks. He seeks to avoid the 'anarchic explosions' of the ultimate destruction of hierarchy (see above, 927), instead keeping hierarchical power intact in a state of quasi-disrupted suspension. This conservative aspect – structured to contain the radical implications of 1968 and anti-colonial revolution – is ultimately the main political contribution of theories like Bhabha's.

This has consequences for the political approaches which follow from deconstructive thought. For example, the importance often assumed for epistemological 'privilege' within co-constituted binaries needs to be be re-evaluated. One can accept that economic or political injustices or oppressions against marginalised groups exist, without accepting the corresponding assumption that these injustices are necessary effects of discursive co-constitution. Reading precarity, forced delinking, and the so-called "surplus population" through a logic of supplementation and co-constitution seems misguided. Often, excluded people are a problem because they don't fit into systems of co-constitution. They have no recognised place inside capitalism. Markets and bureaucratic machines simply bulldoze over people without noticing, or caring, that they're even there. Disrupting the rationalisations of power may make people uncomfortable with the realities, without actually changing them.It also seems oversimplistic to suggest that all linguistic binaries or differentiations involve a hierarchical term and a supplement. Not all categorical systems are hierarchical. One can differentiate lizards from snakes without preferring one to the

other. Only those binaries which attach normative value to one pole carry a risk of authoritarian effects. Therefore, the replacement of loaded binaries with descriptive categories might reduce these kinds of oppression. This is the opposite of the Derridean approach, which seeks to avoid conceptual clarity.

We have come a long way in this work. We have seen how Bhabha adopts assumptions derived from Derrida and Lacan to build a social ontology. This social ontology attaches central importance to self-other co-constitution. We have seen how this ontology leads Bhabha to attribute radical transformative force to inbetwenness, ambivalence and ambiguity. We have seen how this, in turn, leads to a view of border-zones and inbetween spaces as sites of newness and political possibility. We have seen how Bhabha applies these ideas to colonialism, migration, and minorities. Finally, we have explored the relationship of this approach to Bhabha's politics and his political context. We have explored how he emphasises culture over social movement politics, his apparent overlaps with the *Marxism Today* group, his complicities with neoliberalism, his strangely binarised commentaries on other theories, his idea of communities of suffering, and his positing of a right to narrate. Along the way, I have offered critiques of many of the aspects of Bhabha's theory, showing how his dubious ontological beliefs have problematic political consequences.

Ultimately, I would conclude that Bhabha's political vision undercuts radical agency. The slippage of signifiers may be able to disrupt dominant discourse. But this constant slippage also disrupts social movements, and individual psychology. Bhabha's denial of human desires for predictability and control potentially has devastating effects in an era of capitalist-imposed precarity. The refusal of definite images of utopia contributes to the 'present shock' (Rushkoff, 2001) which makes it hard to see beyond the neoliberal world. Radicals' constant demands for self-change and self-abnegation alienate potential allies. And the obsession with who has control over representation displaces the focus of political action from social structures to culture. Resultant political approaches devolve

into fratricidal conflict as different participants compete for control over 'voice' and react against any coalescence of meaning or influence.

Bhabha's suggestions sometimes provide hope for the future. Beyond juxtaposition and mutual anxiety, possibilities need to be found for networks which operate across differences. Horizontal spaces, such as those of autonomous social movements, are the most adequate response to the condition of multiculturalism. However, there is no necessary transition from the current situation to a horizontalist response. Commodified subsumption of differences, or bigoted rejections of differences, are also common responses to the current situation. Also, it is by no means clear that Bhabha is calling for a horizontal, networked or affinity-based recomposition. Often, it seems that the anxiety-inducing, traumatic juxtaposition of differences which cannot be reconciled is enough for him, in itself. It is meant to induce a particular spiritual experience which places the observer beyond binary oppositions. In practice, however, such a position does not change the category-based social world. It does not shake macro-scale categories unless it becomes more than simply an inner change in perspective. Carrying on as before, but with a newly sublime, humble, or re-enchanted awareness of the limits to dominant categories, is not going to change the organisation of the social world. It is going to help to sustain it.

Bibliography: Works by Homi Bhabha

Abbreviations Used for Homi Bhabha Texts

[A] Adagio (2005)

[AI] Affects and Interests (2010)

[AMD] Anxiety in the Midst of Difference (1996)

[ANNS] Anxious Nations, Nervous States (1994)

[BSDP] The Black Savant and the Dark Princess (2004)

[BWRAO] Black and White and Read all Over (1998)

[CA] Conversational Art (1998)

[CF] [Caliban Speaks to Prospero, in Mariani (ed.), *Critical Fictions* (1991)

[CIB] Culture's In-Between (1993/2013)

[D] DissemiNation (1990)

[DD] The Other Question (2002)

[DDR] Democracy De-Realized (2002)

[DH] Diaspora and Home (with K. Stierstorfer, 2017)

[DM1] Doublespeak and the Minority of One (2006)

[DTDA] Dance This Diss Around (1995)

[FBI] Freedom's Basis in the Indeterminate (1992)

[GM] On Global Memory (2009)

[HH] Halfway House (1997)

[IIQ] The Identity in Question (with co-authors, 1992)

[IoP] Identities on Parade (with B. Parekh, 1989)

[ISBD] On the Irremovable Strangeness of Being Different (1998)

[LC] The Location of Culture (1994)

[LS] Laughing Stock (1996)

[LSC] Liberalism's Sacred Cow (1999)

[MD] Making Difference (2003)

[MGM] Minoritization as a Global Measure (with Sheng Anfeng, 2009).

[MM] Minority Maneuvers (1997)

[ODD] On Disciplines and Destinations (2018)

[OF] Opening the Floodgates (1987)

[ONO] Our Neighbours, Ourselves (2011)

[OQ] The Other Question (1982)

[PAS] Poetics of Anxiety and Security (2016)

[PC] Postcolonial Critic (with D. Bennett and T. Collits, 1991)

[PN3] Public Notice 3 (Kallat et al., 2011)

[QE] Queen's English (1997)

[RA] Rethinking Authority (1997)

[RB] The Manifesto/Reinventing Britain: A Forum (1999)

[RCA] Cultural Appropriation: A Roundtable (2017)

[RF] Remembering Fanon (1986, 1987)

[RH] Race and the Humanities (1992)

[SBS] Statement for the *Critical Inquiry* Board Symposium (2004)

[SPD] Staging the Politics of Difference (Olson and Worsham, 1998)

[SS] Spectral Sovereignty, Vernacular Cosmopolitans, and Cosmopolitan Memories (2017)

[TA] Terror and After (2002)

[TS] Third Space (1990)

[TT] Translator Translated (with W.J.T. Mitchell, 1995)

[UE] Untimely Ends (2004)

[UMLA] Unpacking My Library Again (1995)

[VT] Visualizing Theory (with V. Burgess, 1992)

[WH] The World and the Home (1992)

[WOTE] Introduction to Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (2004)

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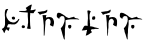
see also 

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